January 2005

Video Games PC Anime DVD Comics Gear

play®

Midnight Club 3 and **Appleseed posters inside!**

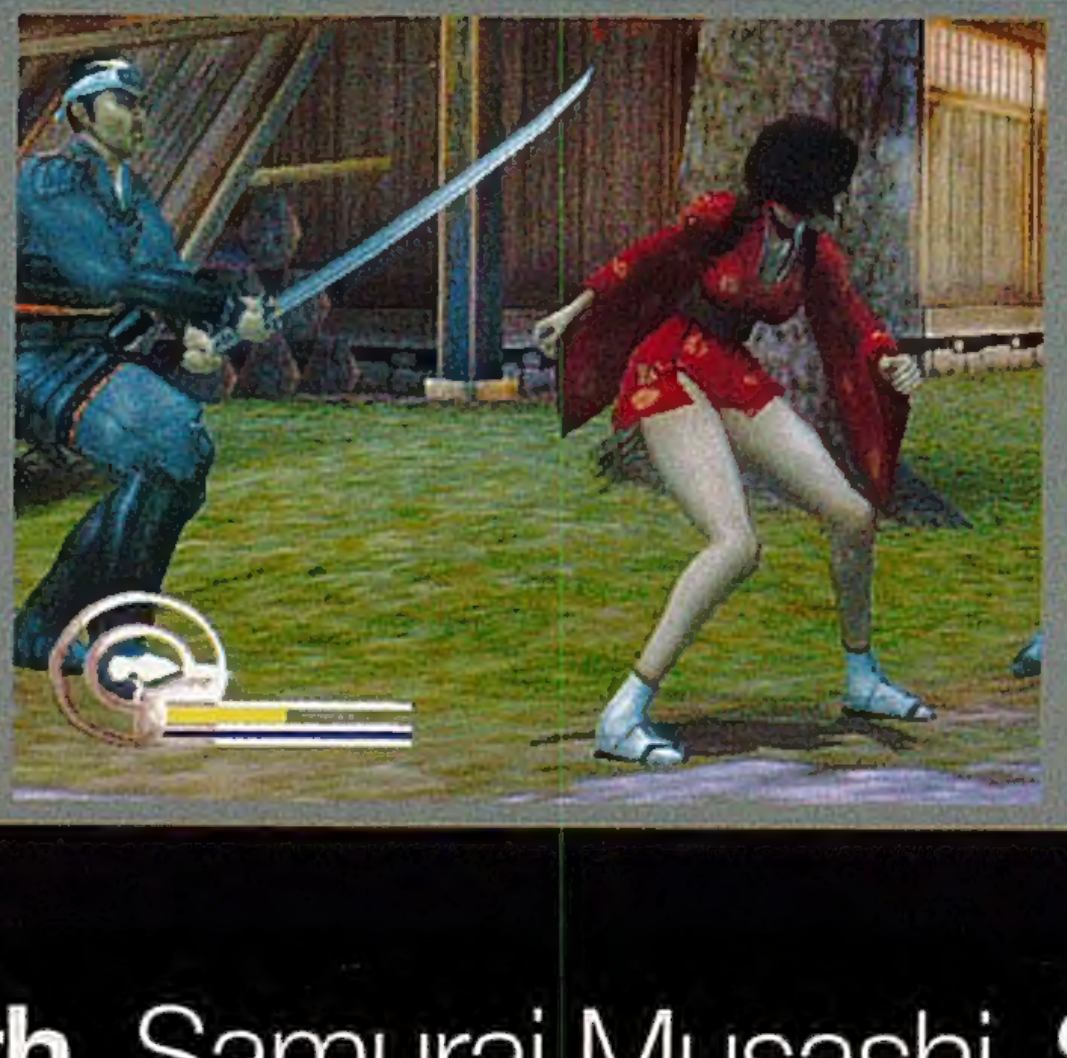
Resident Evil 4

Shinji Mikami and company take survival horror, if not 3D gaming itself, to soaring new heights

Interview

Red Ninja

Upstart Tranji on their new stealth vixen killing machine



Hands-on

Devil May Cry 3

If looks could kill, we'd all be pushin' up daisies...black daisies

Comics

Darkstalkers

An interview with the writer of the astounding new series

U.S. $5.99 CAN $7.99

Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath Samurai Musashi **Shining Tears** Growlanser **World of Warcraft** Samurai Champloo **INSIDE**

RIDICULOUSLY POWERFUL NEW WEAPONS AND GADGETS. YOU'LL WANT TO SPEND

ONLINE
BROADBAND ONLY

PlayStation®2

INSOMNIAC®
GAMES

Ratchet and Clank is a registered trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. Developed by Insomniac Games. ©2004 Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. "Live In Your World. Play In Ours." is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. Online play requires Internet connection, Network Adaptor (for PlayStation®2) or PlayStation®2 with internal network connector, and Memory Card (8MB) (for PlayStation®2) (each sold separately). The "Online" logo is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc.

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Crude Humor
Fantasy Violence

LIVE IN YOUR WORLD.
PLAY IN OURS.™

TIME WITH EACH AND EVERY ONE OF THEM.

RATCHET & CLANK UP YOUR ARSENAL

PlayStation 2
RATCHET & CLANK
UP YOUR ARSENAL
TEEN
T
ESRB
INSOMNIAC
ONLINE
BROADBAND ONLY

This time the destruction is personal. Take on fellow destructophiles from across the nation online. Upgrade weapons to planet-vaporizing levels of firepower. Nuke enemies and friends alike in the single-player and split-screen multiplayer modes. Blast, whip, electrocute or melt your way through amazing new galaxies. So lock, load and gather the troops. You've got some destroying to do.

NOW ONLINE

Watch the TV series
Own the DVDs
CARTOON NETWORK
[adult swim]
FUNimation Productions, Ltd.
ANIPLEX
www.fullmetalalchemist.com
FULLMETAL ALCHEMIST

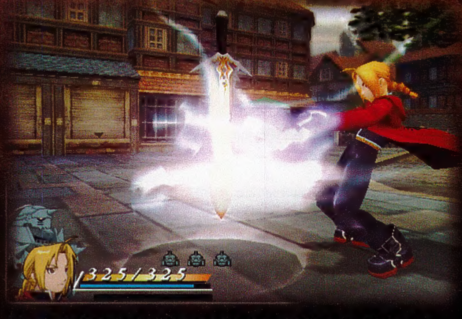
FULLMETAL ALCHEMIST™

and the Broken Angel

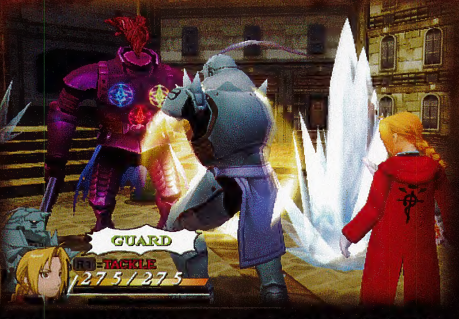
THE HIT ANIME SERIES COMES HOME!

Experience this PlayStation®2 computer entertainment system game based on the wildly popular anime series. Fullmetal Alchemist delivers action-packed excitement, unbelievable gameplay and an enthralling story told through high-quality animated sequences and in-game dialogue.

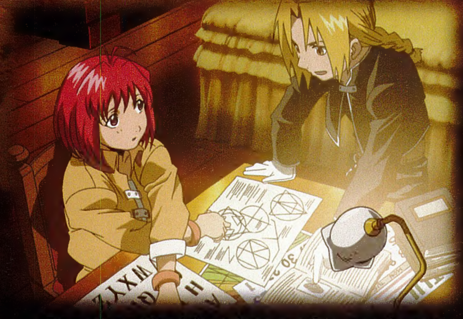
Join Edward and Alphonse on this epic adventure of sacrifice, deception, and power as they use the ancient science of alchemy to battle a myriad of foes. Use the limitless potential of alchemy to transmute common objects into weapons, tools, and vehicles to aid your journey.



Use alchemy to transmute ordinary objects into a huge array of weapons and tools.



Call powerful Alphonse to assist you in battle.



Based on the hit anime series coming to Cartoon Network!

SQUARE ENIX.
www.square-enix.com
Published by Square Enix, Inc.

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Blood
Mild Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence

© 2004 SQUARE ENIX CO., LTD. All Rights Reserved. © HIROMU ARAKAWA/SQUARE ENIX, MBS, ANX, BONES, dentsu 2004. FULLMETAL ALCHEMIST, SQUARE ENIX, and the SQUARE ENIX logo are trademarks of Square Enix Co., Ltd. CARTOON NETWORK, ADULT SWIM and logos are trademarks of and © 2004 Cartoon Network. A Time Warner Company. All rights reserved. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. The ratings icon is a trademark of the Entertainment Software Association.

PlayStation®2

January 2005 Volume 4 Issue 1

Letter from the Editor

37

Star studded

This being the issue that bridges the gap between 2004 and 2005, we've made some subtle changes to usher in our fourth year of Play. After a conference room fracas followed by an endless string of instant messages and emails, we've finally arrived at our new and hopefully improved ratings system. We began Play with a 5 star system, which stuck out like a head banger at a Sinead O'Connor concert next to the standard 4 star system, so we ditched it in favor of grades, which has turned out to be a precarious scale. On the one side we've had readers and publishers recoil at a B-, more so than a C+; the perception being that aspiring above the average C was somehow better than that damning minus hanging off of a B. On the other end of the spectrum we'd have people asking us how we could give say, Halo 2 a "perfect" score when we've only ever given one perfect, that being an A+, the entire year to Ninja Gaiden. Any grading system contains shades of grey, but letters seem better suited for the scholastic world. If we had it our way, people would use the text to draw their conclusions, but this is an industry fixated on scores, and so we meandered over just about every variation in the book before arriving at a democratic solution. My personal choice—being a fan of UK publications—was a big ol' box of fun, including a breakdown of elements, a "better-than/worse-than" area, a numeric score between 1 and 10, and a comment box. Lucky for you, I was up against the exact opposite: a simple 4-star rating all by its lonesome. We ended up somewhere in the middle, with a positive/negative comment box and the standard 4 stars scale for the final grade, which, the more we thought about it, seems like the best way to augment the actual review text. It also bears mentioning that we assign reviews by specialty, and so we've also added a reviews opener defining the crew. If you're in the market for an FPS, we figure you deserve the opinion of a reviewer that lives for the same, and so on down the line. Anyway, there that is. By the time you read this, with any luck our new site will be live (playmagazine.com), so we'd love for you to drop into the forum and let us know what you think. Speaking of the site, we'll have constant reader polls and contests running, and are looking forward to getting your year-in-review picks to include in next month's big year-in-review issue. With the last few big reviews finally out the door, save KOTOR 2, which is still under embargo (because only one magazine's readers deserve a score on that one; it's only *Star Wars*), it's time once again to celebrate 12 months of spectacular gaming. The last year and change of any wave of consoles always brings out the best, and this was a year dotted with more great games spread over more genres and formats than we've ever seen. On the more serious side, in response to the many emails we received about expounding on the recent rash of reports concerning working conditions at certain game developers that make Kathy Lee look like Mother Theresa, we're chasing that story and then some, so stay tuned. And finally, we'd like to welcome our new editor, Ashley Esqueda, to the Play fold. Don't let her super model looks fool you—the girl is a serious gamer (and total *Star Wars* nerd), not to mention as cool as they come. See you next year, everyone; have a safe, happy holiday.

> **"...a year dotted with more great games spread over more genres and formats than we've ever seen."**

Dave Halverson Editor In Chief

play magazine staff

Editorial

Editor In Chief **Dave Halverson**
Editorial Director **Brady Fiechter**
Senior Editor **Chris Hoffman**
Associate Editor **Ashley Esqueda**
Sports/Technology Editor **Tom Ham**
PC Editor **Mike Griffin**
Copy Editor **Zach Korwin**

Design

Art Director **Michael Hobbs**
Associate Art Director **Chin "Nelson" Lui**

Advertising and Sales

Publisher **Michael Eisenberg**

Contact **Michael Eisenberg**
sales@playmagazine.com
Tel 818.707.7786 Ext 102
Fax 818.707.7212

Advertising Director **Greg Diaz**
gdiaz@playmagazine.com

Corporate

Director Of Operations **Julie Halverson**
jhalverson@playmagazine.com
818.707.7786 ext.104

VP of Sales & Marketing **Michael Eisenberg**
meisenberg@playmagazine.com

VP of Business Development **Tom Ham**
tham@playmagazine.com

Administrative Assistant **Jennifer Ford**
jford@playmagazine.com

Subscriptions And Customer Service
888.922.6122
e-mail: playquest@mcmillencomm.com

play magazine Offices
Fusion Publishing, Inc.
29229 Canwood St., Suite 200
Agoura Hills, Ca 91301
Tel 818.707.7786 Fax 818.707.7212

For high-quality customized editorial reprints, contact Graham Peelle, FosteReprints at 886.879.9144 ext 136 or email: gpeelle@fostereprints.com

play magazine partners

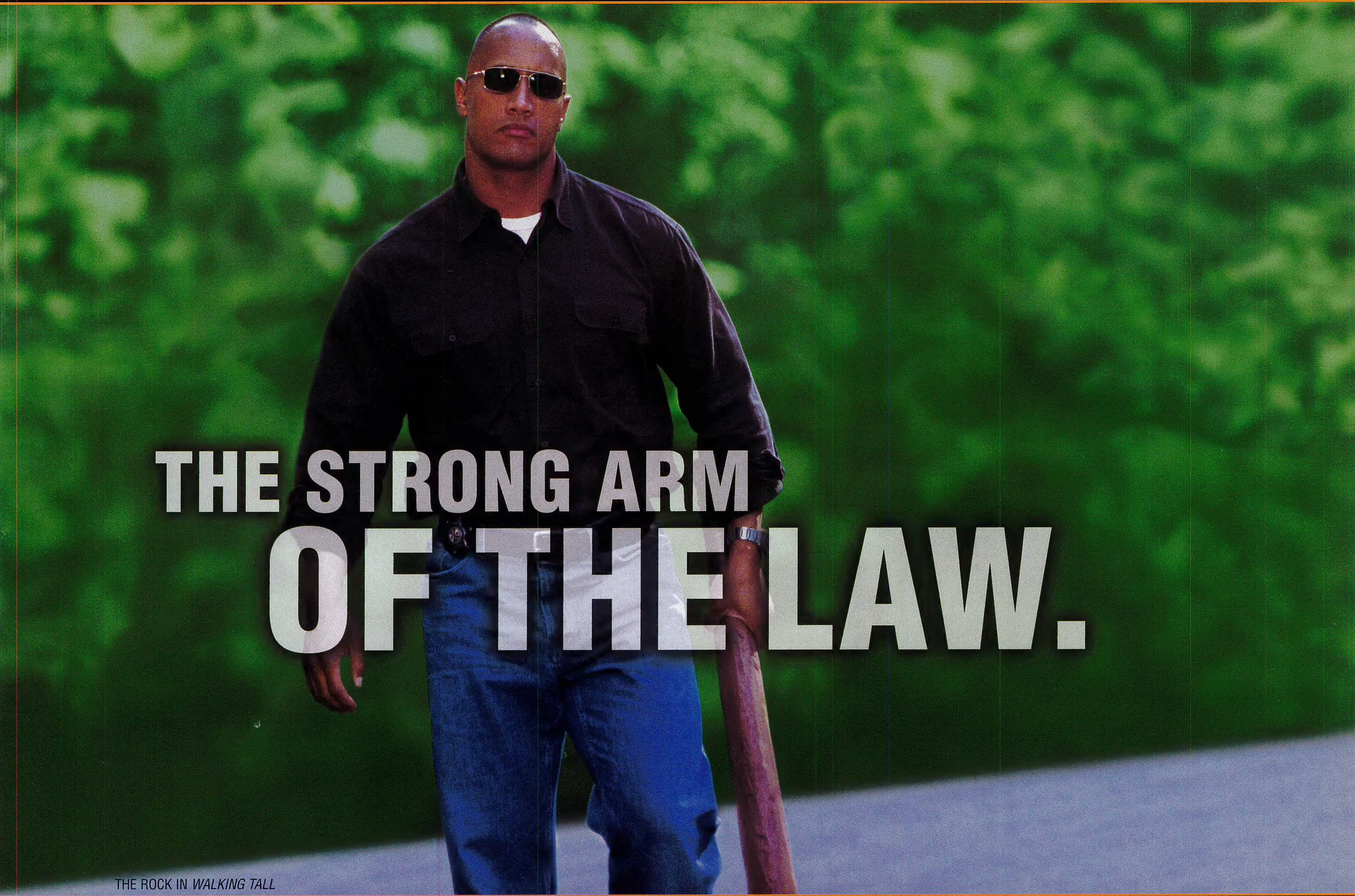
NVIDIA.
Falcon Northwest

Legal Mumbo Jumbo

PLAY™ (ISSN 1537-7539) is published monthly by Fusion Publishing, Inc., 29229 Canwood St., Suite 200, Agoura Hills, CA 91301. Volume 4, Issue 1. Single issue rates: $5.99, yearly newsstand value: $71.88. The one year (12 issue) subscription rate is $19.99 in the U.S., $44.99 in Canada, and $64.99 in all other foreign locales. Checks must be made payable in U.S. currency only to PLAY. Send address changes to PLAY , P.O. Box 500, Missouri City, TX 77459 or e-mail: playcoa@mcmillencomm.com For subscription service questions, call (888)922-6122. We periodically make lists of our customers available to mailers of goods and services that may interest you. If you do not wish to receive such mailings, please write to us and include a copy of your mailing label. Please allow 6-8 weeks before receiving your first issue, as well as for any subscription changes to take place on any existing subscription. The editors and the publisher are not responsible for unsolicited materials; all unsolicited material becomes the property of Fusion Publishing, Inc. Without limiting the rights of copyrights reserved herein, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in, or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior written notice of Fusion publishing, Inc. To reuse any material in this publication, obtain a permission request form by contacting Fusion Publishing, Inc. at (818)707-7786 [phone] or (818)707-7212 [fax]. © Fusion Publishing, Inc. All Rights Reserved, Play™, Fusion Publishing™, Play: Girls of Gaming™, Play: The Calendar™, Fusion Publishing Presents™ are trademarks and copyrights of Fusion Publishing, Inc.™ and © for all other products and the characters contained therein are owned by the respective trademark and copyright owners. All materials listed in this magazine are subject to manufacturers change and the publisher assumes no responsibility for such changes.

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

Metro Goldwyn Mayer
TRADE MARK
MGM MEANS GREAT MOVIES®


THE STRONG ARM
OF THE LAW.

THE ROCK IN *WALKING TALL*

GET IN ON THE ACTION WITH WALKING TALL AND THESE OTHER POWER-PACKED DVDS.

THE ROCK
WALKING TALL
BULLETPROOF MONK
ROAD HOUSE
SCHWARZENEGGER
THE TERMINATOR
DIE ANOTHER DAY
007
ROBOCOP
ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK

WALKING TALL PG-13® SEQUENCES OF INTENSE VIOLENCE, SEXUAL CONTENT, DRUG MATERIAL AND LANGUAGE BULLETPROOF MONK PG-13® VIOLENCE, LANGUAGE AND SOME SEXUAL CONTENT ROAD HOUSE R® THE TERMINATOR R®
DIE ANOTHER DAY PG-13® ACTION VIOLENCE AND SEXUALITY ROBOCOP R® ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK R® All trademarks are the property of their respective owners. © 2005 MGM Home Entertainment LLC. All Rights Reserved. MGM.COM

EYE TOY
antigrav™

PUT DOWN THE CONTROLLER AND BECOME

Your body is the controller as you become one of eight hoverboarders in EyeToy: AntiGrav.™ Blitz, grind and fly cars, pull off motion-sickness-inducing trick combos, and shred the laws of gravity in the only EyeToy™ game Jump on board today at **www.eyetoy-antigrav.com**.

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

www.us.playstation.com

EyeToy: AntiGrav™ Game ©2004 Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. Developed by Harmonix Music Systems. EyeToy: AntiGrav is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. EyeToy is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment Europe. Requires PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system (sold separately). "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. "Live In Your World. Play In Ours." is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc.

0:59.38
75 MPH
2:29.36
LAP 1/5
38 MPH
0:09.16
71 MPH
PlayStation 2
EyeToy
antigrav

EyeToy: AntiGrav™ Includes

EyeToy™ USB Camera
(for PlayStation®2)

EyeToy: AntiGrav™
Game Disc

ONE WITH THE GAME

your way through five futuristic worlds. Dodge airborne
where your actions control the on-screen 3-D character.

PlayStation®2

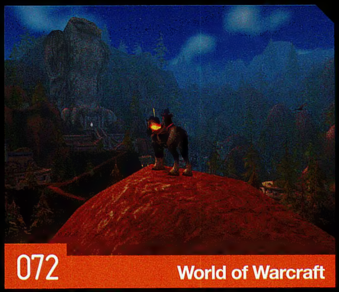
EYE TOY™

FULL BODY CONTROL

LIVE IN YOUR WORLD.
PLAY IN OURS.™

contents

018


072 World of Warcraft

092 Samurai Champloo

106 Darkstalkers

010 **playback**

Tales from San Andreas and other queries

012 **ink**

Gizmondo lives! (we think), DS soars, Microsoft cancels...

018 **cover story**

Resident Evil 4

Shinji Mikami and company shatter the mold, taking adventure horror, if not 3D gaming itself, to a whole new level

028 **previews**

Musashi: Samurai Legend 028, The Getaway: Black Monday 030, Xenosaga Episode II: Jenseits von Gut und Böse 032, Tenchu: Fatal Shadows 034, Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords 036, Devil May Cry 3 038, Shining Tears 040, TimeSplitters: Future Perfect 042

044 **preview gallery**

Including The Legend of Zelda, Doom 3, Destroy All Humans, Tekken V, Nano Breaker, Advance Wars and Mario Baseball

048 **interviews: oddworld & red ninja**

Oddworld discusses unleashing Stranger's Wrath; upstart Japanese developer Tranji on their new super-vixen stealth killing machine: Red Ninja

053 **reviews**

Metroid Prime 2 Echoes 054, Mega Man X8 056, Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas 057, Tork 058, Suikoden IV 059, Call of Duty: Finest Hour 060, Growlanser Generations 062, Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater 064, King of Fighters '02/'03 066

066 **review gallery**

Including GoldenEye: Rogue Agent, Full Metal Alchemist, Mario Power Tennis, The Incredibles and Virtua Quest

072 **play pc**

World of Warcraft is the MMORPG the world has been waiting for! Plus: EverQuest 2, F.E.A.R., Painkiller expansion and more

080 **play sports**

It's college b-ball season! ESPN College Hoops 2K5 and NCAA March Madness 2005 go head to head! Also: Rumble Roses

084 **play mobile**

The latest DS reviews, some of the year's best GBA titles, and some engaging new titles for N-Gage

089 **play anime**

Samurai Champloo is all it's cracked up to be and lots more, plus we get a nice surprise in Daichis: Earth's Defense Family

103 **play media**

All about the Darkstalkers comic (insane art included) plus an interview with the bubbly J-Pop sensation Puffy AmiYumi

109 **artificial**

Crazy urban toys from the weird side of the tracks

110 **gear**

Dynamic duos from the technology zone

ROCKSTAR GAMES
PRESENTS

grand theft auto San Andreas™

A ROCKSTAR NORTH
PRODUCTION

IN STORES
NOW

WWW.ROCKSTARGAMES.COM/SANANDREAS
SOUNDTRACK AVAILABLE ON INTERSCOPE RECORDS

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language
Strong Sexual Content
Use of Drugs

PlayStation®2

© 2004 Rockstar Games, Inc. Rockstar Games, Rockstar North, the R logo, Grand Theft Auto and the Grand Theft Auto logo are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. The ratings icon is a trademark of the Entertainment Software Association. All other marks and trademarks are properties of their respective owners. All Rights Reserved. Note: The content of this videogame is purely fictional, and is not intended to represent any actual person, business or organization. Any similarity between any character, dialogue, event or plot element of this game and any actual person, business or organization is purely coincidental. The makers and publishers of this videogame do not in any way endorse, condone or encourage this kind of behavior.

playback

letters@playmagazine.com

play
JADE EMPIRE
BECOME ONE WITH BIOWARE'S MAGNUM OPUS

San Andreas' fault?

I couldn't believe it when I read your December issue editorial just as I was asking myself the same questions you bring up. I mean on the one hand this game is like, maybe one of the best games I've ever played in terms of size and scope but on the other sometimes I feel at odds with what I'm actually doing. It's funny though that if you really boil it down, it's just a game man. So, that makes these feelings all that much cooler. I mean here I am all concerned about stuff I'm doing…in a game. I guess this is what the next generation is all about. Hey, anyway, thanks for sharing, and for the record, I cannot wait to see what these guys do next! Bad Boys for life!

Val J.

There comes a time when maybe the limits should be pushed in a direction that actually furthers the gaming experience instead bringing it to a dead end. I sat and watched my brother "thug out" in front of San Andreas today. What a piece of crap game! It took this sequel to make me realize that the only really original and creative GTA game was 3. Otherwise Vice City and San Andreas are just jump ups of the same stuff that made 3 so good. What's the problem some people would ask… Most of you at this point will dismiss me for a fool because you JUST LOVE YOUR SAN ANDREAS game don't you? Little do you realize (or maybe you do realize and are so taken by the "gangsta" lifestyle stuff that you don't care) that it's little more than a textural upgrade from the Vice City engine. Not to mention that the new aspects of the game, while slightly upped from Vice City (going into more buildings, and cops chasing people besides you) aren't enough to say that this is a "good game." In fact the only real reason people don't scream and howl about how similar it is to VC (I swear it's just a slightly tweaked version of the VC engine) is because it's so loaded with POPULAR CULTURE! That's right folks! Maybe if you had had brain cell one from the beginning, you'd realize this s*&^ is aimed at you! Hmmm let's see, the teens of America, less intelligent college age people, and some adults eat this up because they live and breathe tripe like MTV! Oh I get all my life lessons from MTV don't you? Rockstar would have made GTA Istanbul if MTV shoveled Turkish music in your faces and told you it was "cool"! But you buy into it, and this game will make the guys at Rockstar more money for selling out to a demographic of morons who can't think for themselves. But hey! Let pop culture, rap, hip-hop and MTV clones do the thinking for you! It's no wonder there are rich execs who can sit in ivory towers and wipe their asses with hundred dollar bills, you make it so easy by being cattle! Not only is San Andreas a s*&^ game, it's a disgrace that Rockstar couldn't have been more innovative with it instead of giving into the pop culture retards that I see every day, people who have no idea what it's like to live in a ghetto, or what it's like to be poor. But hey, the game will teach you! Thanks Rockstar! I'm sure you've made the destitute and poor happy. I'm sure there are struggling families that would love for you to take the pain/suffering they have and perpetuate the already horrid pop culture circus for the brain dead of America!

> "I mean here I am all concerned about stuff I'm doing…in a game. I guess this is what the next generation is all about."

Josh T.

Why are so many people trippin' about a video game? I jump around online and I find people all over the map on what? A game man. What's the difference between splattering an alien, a nazi, a thug a pedestrian or whatever? People do what they like for entertainment and I don't see why anyone should care or go on about what someone else might see as cool, you know? I mean, back when you guys ripped on real-life stripping, that was one thing. I can see where people might have a problem with that, but I've been shootin' anything that moves in video games since I was a little kid.

Go-bot

Too much coffee?

It seems that every day, yet another old game from the '80s or '90s is suddenly being reinvented as the hip new thing on current consoles. Games like Narc and Area 51, heck, even Namco is doing it with Castle of Druaga. But there are a lot of classic characters out there that we haven't heard from in years that need to make a return. How about Wizards & warriors? I know Acclaim is dead (it sure would be cool if someone picks up The Red Star, by the way), but Rare made the games, so why not a new Xbox Wizards and Warriors from Microsoft? Maybe they could bring Fabio back and everything—real-time bump-mapped motion-captured Fabio action! While I'm on the subject of Rare, why are they just sitting on Battletoads? If the Ninja Turtles can make a comeback, so can the Battletoads. Or at least make a port of that arcade game as bonus in Conker or something. We've been waiting long enough, Rare, why not rhow us a bone? Nintendo has Punch-Out, of course, and everbody wants to see that make a return, but what about that other long-forgotten Nintendo sports game: that's right—Pro Wrestling. Back before the Rock was even thinking of laying the smack down, it was all about Starman vs. the Amazon, flip-kicks and head-bites…just think what Nintendo could do with those characters on GameCube. I'll even settle for GBA, just as long as I can see the Amazon eat people again. Way better than that Ultimate Muscle stuff on TV. Anyway, the buzz from my coffee is wearing off now, so I'm starting to run out of great ideas, but just imagine what these companies could do with some of this untapped IP.

Jimmy V.

PS Red Dog on Dreamcast RULES!

Gaming sweat shops?

I don't know if you're aware of this or not, but there's a lot of talk going around about how a certain major publisher that's cornered the market on sports and licensed games has been baiting people to work for them, then essentially destroying their lives only to kick them out the door for the next victim when they finally get fed up, or just fry. Do you know this to be true? And if so, is it widespread? If this is true then how come you guys haven't done a feature on it yet? Is this gaming's dirty little secret or something? Are you afraid of repercussions? If so, don't be. This sounds like some messed up stuff. I can't even bring myself to play their games now, that's how much it's affected me. Enlighten me, Play!

Unsigned

We're aware of the reports and have heard the horror stories. This is clearly a prickly issue, and a topic in the industry that's not likely to go away. We hope to bring you some detailed news on the subject pending some in-depth research.

THE EPIC JAK TRILOGY IS COMING TO ITS DRAMATIC CONCLUSION.
REST ASSURED, IT WON'T END LIKE THIS.

The conclusion,

the answers,

the end of the epic.

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Comic Mischief
Language
Mild Violence
Suggestive Themes

PlayStation®2 NAUGHTY DOG®

LIVE IN YOUR WORLD.
PLAY IN OURS.™

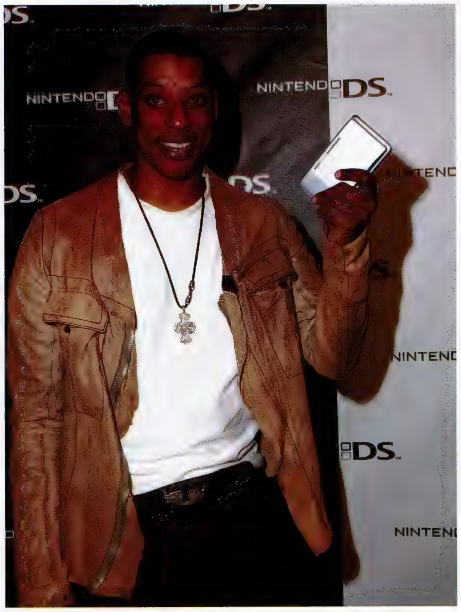
www.us.playstation.com.
Official strategy guide now available. Free sample downloads at www.piggybackinteractive.com.

Jak 3 is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. Created and developed by Naughty Dog, Inc. ©2004 Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. "Live In Your World. Play In Ours." is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc.

ink

news | trends | gossip | assorted nonsense

Nintendo DS Launch



Nintendo's DS hits big

Celebrities—and later many gamers—came out to play Nintendo's new dual screen wonder, leading to sales of 500,000 DS units sold over the Thanksgiving holiday, representing over 90 percent of the allocation for the entire U.S. With additional shipments now being rushed to stores nationwide, Nintendo estimates that they will have sold 1 million units by the end of the year. In contrast, the revolutionary iPod took 19 months to hit that mark. Reggie (Reggie Fils-Aime, Nintendo of America's executive vice president of sales and marketing, that is) wasted no time in tooting the company horn, stating that "consumers have voted the Nintendo DS as the hot item this holiday, so if you see one, you'd better buy it." He continued, "Nintendo owns the handheld market, and once again we're the hit of the holiday season." What's even more astounding is that the Game Boy Advance (which is on track to become the leading hardware unit of the year) sold 800,000 units over the same weekend, for a combined Nintendo hardware rout of 1.3 million units. On top of their handheld success, the GameCube, on track to become the most under-realized hardware since the Dreamcast thanks to stodgy third parties, has sold over 250,000 units since Mario Kart: Double Dash!! became the pack-in. Next up…RE 4, which, on GC, is already considered among the best top five of all time as far as we're concerned. Toot away, Reggie!

Show me the DS!
Clockwise from upper right: Orlando Jones, Cuba Gooding Jr. and Rachel Hunter, Anthony Kiedis and guest, Taryn Manning and Sarah Chalk.

Kameo flies away; B.C. bombed

Mutating fairy can't find her groove thing...B.C. extinct?

Remember those frustrating Rare game delays, back when they produced the leading games in the world, in the days when Nintendo reigned supreme? Well, some things never change, as Kameo—the game originally slated for the GameCube before Rare took the Gates bait—has again been pushed back, this time "indefinitely" after both developer and publisher agreed to several major changes, of which, we presume, involve playing more as Kameo and less as her aiding and abetting counterparts. There's even rumblings that the game may be pushed yet again, onto Xbox 2, which would make it the first game to jump consoles a third time. With Rare's first game since Microsoft kicked a gaggle of great games to the curb and paid a king's ransom to acquire the studio, Grabbed by the Ghoulies, bombing due to a completely ungroovy lead character, Kameo (as well as Conker) are obviously crucial to the union, which so far looks to be becoming one of the most dubious deals ever. Imagining what Rare would have been able to produce on GameCube—for their target audience, no less (which seems to have stuck to the Nintendo pride for the most part)—one has to wonder if the acquisition was really the beginning of the end of the mighty Rare we once knew.

In other Xbox cancellation/delay news (which is becoming a disturbing trend), Lionhead Studios has ceased development on Intrepid's Xbox title B.C., despite the fact that the game was nearly complete—a completely puzzling turn of events given Fable's success and the fact that B.C. looked nothing short of revolutionary. A rep told us at press time that the game had not been cancelled but postponed, although managing director Peter Molyneux sounds rather cryptic, stating that "The decision to suspend work on any game project is always a very difficult one, particularly when it is a title with the potential of B.C. We hope to revive the project at a later date and will endeavor to assign as many of the team as possible to other Lionhead projects." All of this points to one of two things: either Microsoft is distancing themselves altogether from publishing original titles beyond 2005, or that the Xbox 2 is close at hand and in need of killer apps. Our money is on Microsoft pulling a Sega and trying to beat Nintendo and Sony to the next-generation punch.

That's some Gizmo

The world's most powerful handheld, headed here

Anticipation has been building in the UK around the fourth-quarter launch of the Gizmondo handheld, which is headed stateside early next year according to Europe Ltd. (Gizmondo), a subsidiary of Jacksonville, Florida-based Tiger Telematics Inc., which recently purchased Warthog, earmarking their portfolio of 12 additional games for development on the Gizmondo as well Warthog's immensely powerful proprietary game engine porting tool, Tusk, which will significantly speed up the conversion process of third-party games currently being signed to the new format. Pre-order figures following the first TV teaser campaign, which began airing across Europe over the last couple of weeks, have lead to more than 500,000 pre-books, intriguing gamers with the prospect of essentially a handheld PC games unit. The Gizmondo is powered by a Microsoft Windows CE.net platform, boasts a 2.8-inch TFT color screen with a Samsung ARM9 400MHz processor and incorporates the GeForce 3D 4500 Nvidia graphics accelerator. It provides cutting-edge gaming, multimedia messaging, an MP3 music player, MPEG4 movie playing capability, a digital camera and a GPRS network link to allow wide-area network gaming. Additionally, it contains a GPS chip for location-based services, is equipped with Bluetooth for use in multiplayer gaming and accepts MMC card accessories. The price for the Gizmondo is £229.00, or $419.12 if you choose to import now, which can be done at www.gizmondo.com.

GHOST IN THE SHELL 2
INNOCENCE
"This is one of the absolute best films you'll see this year!"
– Harry Knowles, Ain't It Cool News
PG-13
VIOLENCE, DISTURBING IMAGES AND BRIEF LANGUAGE
Own It Today On DVD!
PRODUCTION I.G
GO FISH PICTURES
© 2004 Shirow Masamune / KODANSHA • IG, ITNDDTD. Layout and Design: TM & © 2004 Go Fish Pictures. All Rights Reserved.

Uematsu composes new studio

Musician leaves Square Enix, founds "Smile Please"

Game music fans, Nobuo Uematsu has left the building. Actually, he has left Square Enix. However, this doesn't mean that gamers have heard the last of the man responsible for so many memorable Final Fantasy compositions—quite the opposite, in fact, as his reason for leaving is to found a new, independent music studio called "Smile Please." The new studio's purpose will be to develop music for video games and other media, including live performances, and there's no reason his composition won't continue to be heard in future Square Enix projects. We also wouldn't be surprised to see Smile Please collaborating with Mist Walker—the game studio founded earlier this year by Final Fantasy creator Hironobu Sakaguchi.

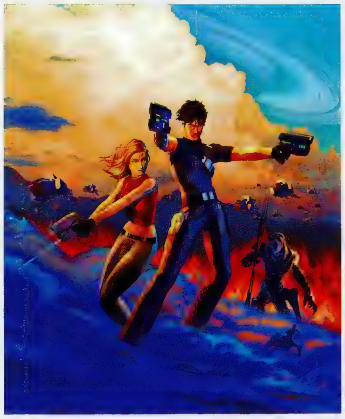
SMILE PLEASE

The name may be silly, but with Nobuo Uematsu at the helm, Smile Please should keep fans grinning.

Advent already rising

Majesco announces Advent Shadow for PSP

With Donald Mustard's epic brain-child Advent Rising (the intergalactic saga created with award-winning science fiction author Orson Scott Card) nearing birth—slated for release Q1 2005—Majesco has already seen fit to expand on the story, announcing Advent Shadow as their first PSP game, due out sometime in late 2005. Written and directed by the creators of the Advent trilogy and developed by Full Fat, Advent Shadow will be an entirely new game designed exclusively for the PSP and will chronicle the story of Marin Steel, a mercenary pilot thrust into the intergalactic saga when her escape from a hostage situation (she being the hostage) is interrupted by a genocidal alien invasion bent on humanity's demise. During her escape, she meets Advent Rising protagonist Gideon Wyeth, upon which the two will do their best to survive the onslaught and fell the dying world. "Advent Shadow allows us to further develop the character of 'Marin' through a completely new experience set in the same universe, but completely separate from the Advent trilogy," said Mustard. "We've utilized the same themes and elements to expand upon some of the sub-plots of the trilogy and added compelling new gameplay to create a truly unique handheld experience."



Gideon and Marin looking all heroic, as featured on our Dec. 2003 cover.

Interview

Bill Van Buren, creative lead, Valve Half-Life 2 team

Bill Van Buren has over 20 years of experience in the realm of interactive entertainment. His credits run the gamut between Half-Life, the production of interactive music titles for Sting and Peter Gabriel, and, most recently, creative lead on Half-Life 2. In the aftermath of HL2's release, Play caught up with Mr. Van Buren at the Montreal Game Summit where we discussed some of the finer points of Half-Life 2's creative direction and Valve's future plans.

play: Near the end of a game development period as extensive as Half-Life 2's, what were you looking for as a creative lead?
Bill Van Buren: When we're that far along, we're not necessarily looking to see if the game is fun. We've done a lot of player testing to proof the game-design concepts. So a lot of what we're doing at that point is trying to break the game. We're going out of our way to get stuck or find stuff that would cause a bad user experience. That means consciously playing through the game in a different way each time to see if it happens.

Surely some part of that involves anticipating how *most* players would move through an area based on level design?
We certainly have expectations about how somebody is meant to play an area, but it doesn't pay to rely on that. We try to have robust solutions so that somebody is not going to have a terrible time if it doesn't occur to them to play a certain way.

Near the end of HL 2, when the Gravity Gun gets juiced up and enemies are like puppets, it's fun as hell, sure, but you feel almost...too powerful. Why did you go in this direction?
We figured that if there's a game design [aspect] that you need to have this big, difficult, un-fun boss challenge at the end of a game...and it's kind of this accepted game design notion...well, a lot of us don't find that fun anymore. We thought, with what you had to go through in the street wars section—you really had to work hard for that, it was pretty tough stuff—we reckon that was the main quest. So the whole intention once you entered the Citadel was to have it be your reward—the big payoff. We did that in a couple of ways: One was with the story unfolding by building your relationship with Dr. Breen, and the other way was giving you that incredible power. You still had adversaries and challenges, but it was fun.

The next generation is creeping up. What kind of tech are you anticipating? What direction are we going in?
I wish I had the answer. I can tell you about some of the stuff that benefits us. We'll be moving our characters a whole lot closer to some of the things that you can do in movies...in bigger and more detailed worlds. Improved rendering effects, also—more accurate effects.

> "We'll be moving...a whole lot closer to some of the things that you can do in movies..."

Now that the Source engine is fully developed, will you be able to roll out the next Half-Life in a much shorter time?
That's what I hope. Now that we've built this complete new engine, and it's really powerful...truthfully we're still just tapping a bit of it...we can make target investments on the things we really want to accomplish: specific new types of gameplay, specific new devices and specific new monsters—as opposed to the "whole package" that we delivered on Half-Life 2.

Valve's been pretty mum about revealing the other parties and projects using their engine. How do you support the official mod-makers?
I think it's sort of like the Farm Leagues. You have this group of people, and when they start to do well enough, it's something that you watch over and support. Counter-Strike, Team Fortress and Day of Defeat are all Half-Life mod teams that ended up getting bought up by Valve and hired. They're all core contributors now, so it's a really interesting phenomenon. I guess we're kind of like the Combine: When somebody starts messing with teleportation, these guys pick 'em up on radar and assimilate them. When somebody starts making good mods...

Kontrollers for kollectors

Limited-edition Mortal Kombat peripherals debut

Continuing their trend of releasing limited-edition controllers featuring artwork themed for specific games, Nubytech has released a new series of Mortal Kombat "kontrollers" based upon Mortal Kombat: Deception. For PlayStation 2, players can select from Sub-Zero, Scorpion or Baraka as their blood-soaked kombatant of choice (the artwork is definitely M-rated), while on Xbox, only Sub-Zero and Scorpion are available, but the controllers boast lenticular images. Although not functionally any different from stock pads, the controllers do feature high-grade collector's packaging and a booklet with an MK comic book and other artwork. Coming next from Nubytech: an official Street Fighter joystick.

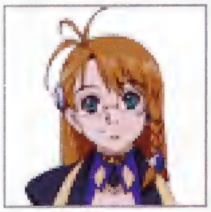
Sony Cells out

PlayStation 3 technology is at hand

The PlayStation 3 came one step closer to reality in late November when Sony, SCEI and IBM announced that they "powered-on" the first Cell processor-based workstation—the same technology that will be the basis for the PS3. The successful activation of the prototype workstation should prove to be a significant milestone in the development of next-generation gaming, as the powerful processor, developed by IBM, will be able to work by itself or in unison with other Cell processors to create highly advanced physics models, animation routines and other essentials of game creation; in technical terms, the chip should be able to reach a performance of 16 trillion floating point calculations per second. "The Cell processor-based workstation will totally change the digital content creation environment," stated Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. corporate executive and CTO Masayuki Chatani in a press release. "Its overwhelming power will be demonstrated in every aspect of the development of all kinds of digital entertainment content, from movies [and] broadcast programs to next-generation PlayStation games." In addition, the Cell processor is also planned for use in HDTVs, broadband servers and other technologies. The companies announced that further details will be revealed in February.

The saga continues in anime form

Xenosaga to hit Japanese airwaves



Even as North American gamers await the release of Xenosaga Episode II, fans overseas are set to experience another aspect of Monolith Soft/Namco's epic sci-fi RPG series—that being in anime form. *Xenosaga: The Animation* will make its debut on Japanese airwaves starting Wednesday nights in January. Based on the events of Xenosaga Episode I, the series will follow the exploits of chief engineer Shion Uzuki, battle android KOS-MOS and the allies they encounter as they battle the Gnosis menace and explore secrets of the universe in what the creators are calling a "new century space opera." Toei Animation will be handling the transition to anime form—an interesting choice to handle Xenosaga's sweeping drama, considering the studio is best known for lighthearted fare such as *Ultimate Muscle*, *Digimon* and, yes, *Dragon Ball Z*—with an experienced creative staff with veterans from titles such as *Escaflowne*, *Gundam Seed* and *Infinite Ryvius*. As usual, nothing has been announced regarding a U.S. release at this point, but it seems likely.

We're guilty

In the Guilty Gear Isuka review in the December issue of Play, the reviewer incorrectly mentioned that the game was being offered at a $20 price point. This is not the case, as the MSRP is $50. However, this does not affect the score in any way, and it remains highly recommended. We apologize for the error.

WIN heroic stuff from City of Heroes!

Pay nothing now, or ever! Simply go to playmagazine.com and enter by clicking on the contests button. Nothing to buy! So easy, so fun! It's the heroic thing to do.

Grand Prize: (1) City of Heroes Battle Poster – signed by the development team at Cryptic Studios
(1) Copy of the City of Heroes Collector's DVD Edition
(1) 60-Day time card (launch and play for 90 days free!)
(1) each City of Heroes and City of Villains T-Shirts
4 runners up will receive a copy of the City of Heroes Collector's DVD Edition
And 10 third place winners get the original City of Heroes game.
All winners get a free year of Play

Purchase any title featured below at your nearest Virgin Megastore or online at virginmega.com

database

sponsored by Virgin MEGASTORE VIRGINMEGA.COM

Virgin Megastore Top Ten

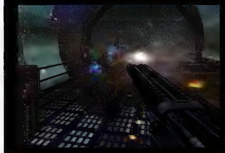
01	**Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas** rockstar / ps2
02	**Halo 2** microsoft game studios / xb
03	**Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater** konami / ps2
04	**Half-Life 2** vu games / pc
05	**Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2** ubisoft / xb
06	**Star Wars KOTOR II** lucasarts / xb
07	**Gran Turismo 4** sony / ps2
08	**Metroid Prime 2 Echoes** nintendo / gc
09	**Need for Speed Underground 2** ea / ps2, xb, gc
10	**GoldenEye: Rogue Agent** ea / ps2, xb, gc

NPD/TRSTS Top Ten Oct. Game Sales

01	**Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas** rockstar / ps2
02	**NBA Live 2005** ea / ps2
03	**Mortal Kombat: Deception** midway / ps2
04	**ESPN NBA 2K5** sega/take 2 / ps2
05	**Tony Hawk's Underground 2** activision / ps2
06	**Mortal Kombat: Deception** midway / xb
07	**ESPN NBA 2K5** sega/take 2 / xb
08	**Paper Mario: Thousand-Year Door** nintendo / gc
09	**Madden NFL 2005** ea / ps2
10	**X-Men Legends** activision / ps2

20:56
$00009630

Your Megastore Beckons!



GoldenEye: Rogue Agent
ea / ps2, xb, gc

For years you've had to be the do-gooding secret agent 007...but now you can experience the Bond universe from the other side!

Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater
konami / ps2

Embark on Operation: Snake Eater to experience some of the most mesmerizing visuals and edge-of-your-seat gameplay ever devised.

Star Wars KOTOR 2
lucasarts / xb

Return to that galaxy far, far away in the sequel to one of 2003's most popular RPGs. Will you use the Force for good or turn to the Dark Side?

Staff and reader selections

vote for your most wanted games! database@playmagazine.com

Readers' Most Wanted database@playmagazine.com

01	**Star Wars KOTOR II** lucasarts / xb
02	**Resident Evil 4** capcom / gc
03	**The Legend of Zelda** nintendo / gc
04	**Devil May Cry 3** capcom / ps2
05	**Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath** ea / xb

Dave Halverson editor in chief

01	**Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath** ea / xb
02	**Resident Evil 4** capcom / gc
03	**Jak 3** sony / ps2
04	**Halo 2** microsoft game studios / xb
05	**Blinx 2** microsoft game studios / xb

Brady Fiechter executive editor

01	**Resident Evil 4** capcom / gc
02	**Metroid Prime 2 Echoes** nintendo / gc
03	**Jak 3** sony / ps2
04	**Mario Power Tennis** nintendo / gc
05	**Halo 2** microsoft game studios / xb

Chris Hoffman some editor

01	**Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater** konami / ps2
02	**Xenosaga Episode II** namco / ps2
03	**Mega Man X8** capcom / ps2
04	**Feel the Magic: XY/XX** sega / ds
05	**Growlanser Generations** working designs / ps2

Michael Hobbs art director

01	**Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater** konami / ps2
02	**Resident Evil 4** capcom / gc
03	**Super Mario 64 DS** nintendo / ds
04	**Ridge Racer DS** namco / ds
05	**FFXI Online: Chains of Promathia** square enix / pc

Ashley Esqueda associate editor

01	**Star Wars KOTOR II** lucasarts / xb
02	**Ghosts n' Goblins** capcom / nes
03	**Growlanser Generations** working designs / ps2
04	**Star Wars Galaxies** lucasarts / pc
05	**The Incredibles** thq / ps2

Resident Evil 4

Survival horror reborn

Closing out the brief video premiere of Resident Evil 4 way back at the Nintendo E3 2002 press conference, series creator Shinji Mikami stared humorously into the camera: "Don't pee your pants!" Everyone got a good laugh, but the immensely talented director of this long-overdue—and, since that prescient warning, entirely retooled—sequel was preparing us for something truly shocking.While reactions may vary, other side effects will likely include sheer adrenaline rush, emotional disturbance, enthrallment, the sudden urge to scream and curse in equal doses of awe and excitement, fan-boy pleasure and the occasional need to call a friend and discuss what the bloody hell just happened.

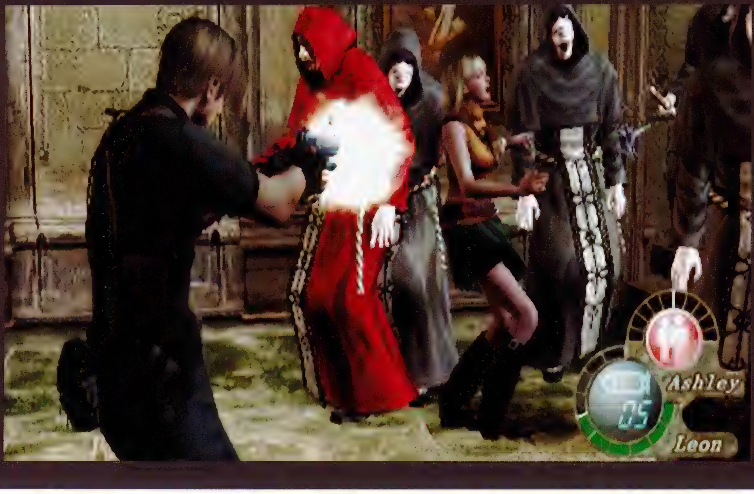
My combined reaction: Resident Evil 4 had me in its grip stronger than any game I've played this year. Maybe any year, for that matter—and the game isn't even finished. As the first person in the world to be gifted an extended stay in this newest Resident Evil outside the creators themselves, I feel lucky; I still haven't even seen all of what's inside, and I thankfully have no idea what will finally be revealed. Mikami and his team are being very secretive, hoping that, like myself going in for the first time knowing practically nil, you approach the game with anticipated mystery; for this feature, they requested that many substantial details be avoided.

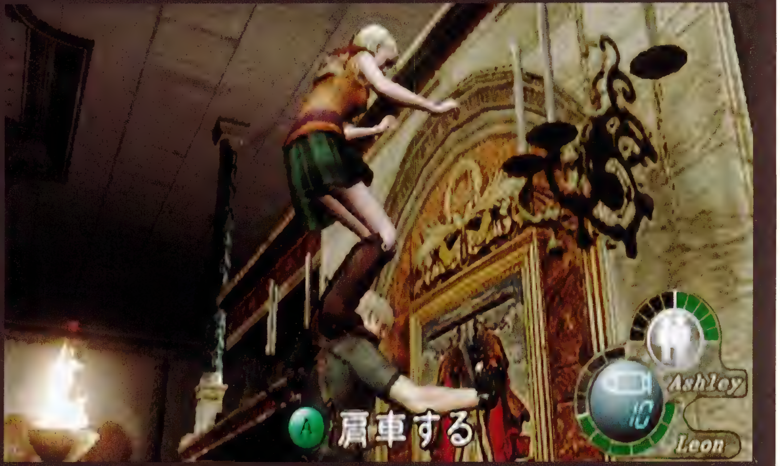
> "Pop him in the face, and he convincingly grasps in pain, reeling back with a sudden intensity..."

As the game opens, RE fans will feel especially at home, taking control of Leon S. Kennedy, now a clandestine U.S. agent, six years removed from his duties investigating the zombie-led destruction of Raccoon City. In Leon's latest mission, a search for the President's missing daughter, Ashley, he makes a stop at a strange village somewhere in rural Europe, where the villagers dress in 1800s farm attire and wield work tools as weapons (just wait till you see where it goes from there...). The whole place initially looks like an elegant *Little House on the Prairie* after the grim reaper decided to redecorate. Lovely touches abound, like pools of rot and skull mounds infested with maggots wriggling in hollow eye sockets, maidens nailed to the wall by pitchfork through the face, and your driver to this awful world strung up over a bonfire, skewered by a hook the size of an elephant tusk; bonus points for that awful kink in the broken neck.

Right out the gate, when one of the hypnotically creepy inhabitants goes nuts in his cabin, you begin to see how powerfully well Resident Evil 4 sells its violence. Pop him in the face, and he convincingly grasps in pain, reeling back with a sudden intensity. Given your feeble stock weapon—which will be replaced by an array of infinitely more powerful boomsticks—he regains composure for another attack. Target the leg, and he'll collapse depending on the impact. Wear him down and you'll be able to explode his skull with a precision shot.

Once the expertly placed music fades its tension to silence, you can examine the dead body, in familiar Resident Evil fashion, noting slyly: "He's not a zombie." Well then, what are these wicked, less-than-human beings, their eyes glowing with such a palpable sense of evil you can't escape the unease? Ahh, the intriguing mystery of it all...and there is a genuine desire to continue the search for answers, even if the slight occult setup could be accused of obvious banality—a non-issue, given the surreal context and typically irony-free Japanese descriptors. The first hint comes in an amazingly effective scene where you're besieged by a rabid pack pouring in from all corners of the village, the attackers eventually retreating to the sound of a tower bell. Growling in a Spanish dialect that almost sounds like jumbled Latin at first—a marvelous touch that ratchets up the nightmarishly dreamlike mood—one villager mumbles, "Lord Sadler." Leon eventually meets this contemptuous master of the community, who takes the conversation to





Once rescued, Ashley certainly earns her keep.

some curious ground.

Wherever the story takes us, the images and settings are what fuel the unusual emotion here. In all my years of gaming, I can't think of anything that's even come close to drawing me in with this sort of severe intensity and tremendous visual immersion. The illusion of an actual place is startling, and the details that spill into every shadow, into every weathered corner and fire-lit path is a work of visual poets. Most games look like games, like extrusions of blocks meant to house gameplay, like a perceptively artificial 3D space that looks pieced together. Resident Evil 4 is like walking through a real place, a mood painting that has been given form. Games are not art? For the time I spent in the game, I was traveling through one piece of art after another, not just observing a static work of imagination from a distance.

The way everything is carved out, designed to feel connected and flowing is remarkable. Part of the powerful tie to the game's world is all the solid interaction, from diving through open spaces, climbing ladders and moving around endless nooks and crannies to walking on roofs and over fallen debris and makeshift bridges. The integration of puzzles is also impressive and much more sophisticated than we've seen in the series. Simple sequences like targeting chains holding boxes over a river to create a path to open a waterwheel are a blast, if only in the way they bring tangibility to the area and serve as a sensible course of action within the game's reality. Because of the bizarre setup, engaging tasks like climbing a well-placed ladder in a church, jumping across a chandelier, rearranging lenses on a projector to configure patterns across the color spectrum to open a door just seem…well, to make weird sense.

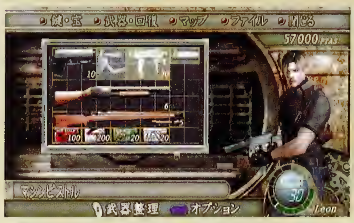
Sometimes reaching blocked areas requires teamwork, which comes into play when you free Ashley, who must be protected and carefully led around the growing obstacle course of death. Leon can have her wait or follow him with simple commands, and at times you'll take sole control of Ashley for a different twist on the action.

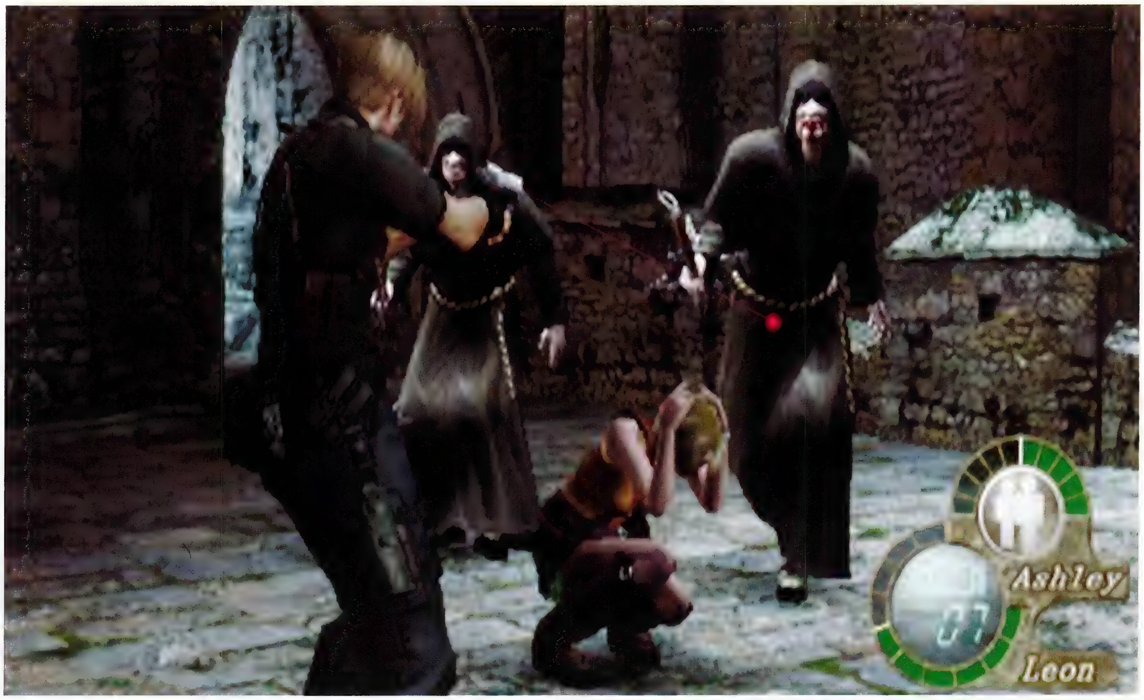
> "…you're really dealing with an entirely new monster this time out."

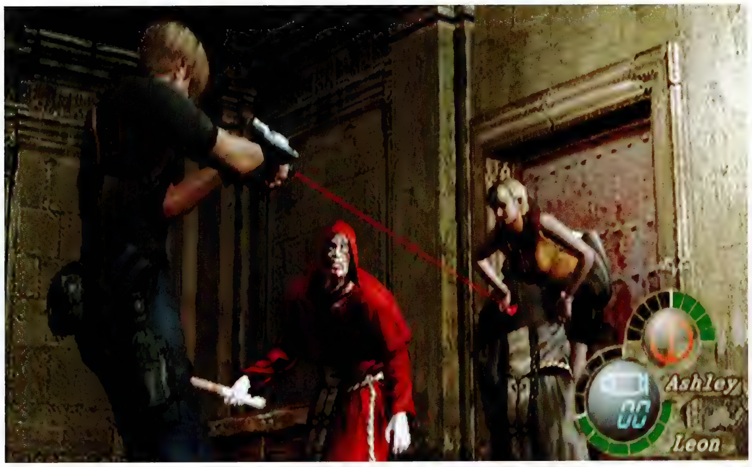
No, controlling both these gorgeously drawn characters is not a perceptible chore the hateful like to ascribe to the Resident Evil series in the past, with an entirely revamped control scheme and gameplay thrust driving the game to new ground. Combining herbs and saving with the typewriter (without ribbons) are nice RE cues, but you're really dealing with an entirely new monster this time out. Combat with the creatures is a wild ride with every single shot fired: the way they move, the way they react, the way they look and seem to be alive in the world, not just roadblocks dropped in to pose as fun shooting-gallery targets. It feels so freaking awesome to collapse someone violently with a shotgun—has a shotgun ever been this destructively satisfying in a game?—or

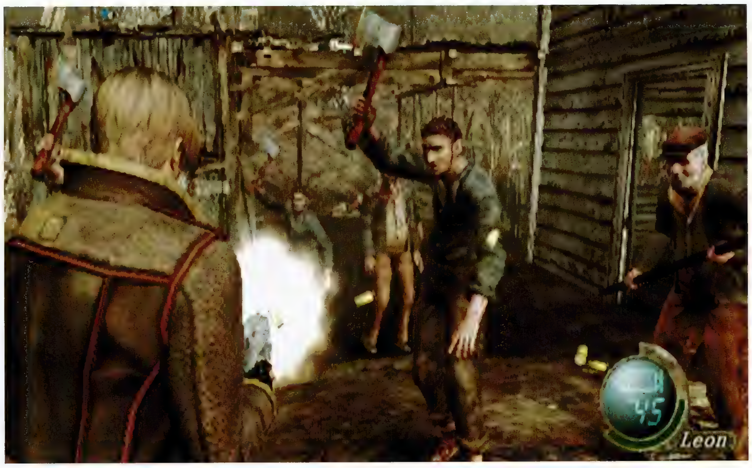
Weapon Merchants

These guys mysteriously pop up around the village, cutting deals for buying and selling. They occasionally present challenges that, when met, reward you with rare items. Important weapons upgrades also go through their hands—for a substantial price. Leon can buy attaché cases to increase carrying capacity, as well.









And who might this be? The plot thickens...

knock a poor bastard off a bridge with a rifle snipe in the leg.

So amazingly established is this world and its evil that simply existing is an unsettling, compelling motive. And some of the encounters really must be experienced to understand. Consider a moment when all hell is breaking loose, and I escape to a rundown house. A villager immediately knocks down the door—I love the force these freaks impart—runs screaming at me with a raised sheath, then stops, disturbingly silent and seemingly looking straight into my soul with a ghastly gaze. We both freeze for several seconds, and he goes quickly running back out the door before a mass of bodies follow from behind, pinning me to the wall. Somehow I'm able to knock a blade out of one guy's hand, burn another alive as I send a shot ripping through his raised torch, and deflect a flying axe heading straight for me—feeling as if nothing was calculated as much as instinctive and immediately reactionary. Along with a handful of examples before it and many to follow, this was a kind of experience I simply have never felt with a video game before.

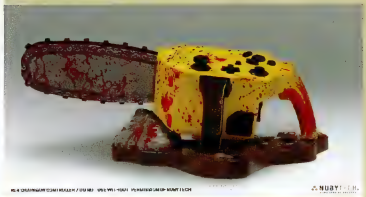
Resident Evil 4 should be called an interactive movie in a most important way: you feel this game as you would an effective movie, morosely moved by its artistic spirit. That it is so strong in its presentation—cutscenes are masterful in their energy and presentation—is certainly a huge part of that. But the understanding of pacing and when to draw the line between watching and interacting is what shines most subtly. The game hits us with bursts of quick sequences, and adds a newly effective mode of interaction in some of those sequences with button cues that flash on the screen; you really aren't doing much other than pounding away, but somehow you are a part of the intensity in a manner you wouldn't be in a more directly active gameplay moment.

Sometimes modern game design can get caught up in too much presentation over what we traditionally love in actually playing our games. Not RE4. Even the little things like scattering blue medallions to be shot off strings adds so much to the mechanics. Turn those medallions in for a special weapon upgrade with the merchant—a cloaked figure who mysteriously shows up to aid you on your quest with goods. His presence is odd and random, recalling the shopkeeper in Symphony of the Night. Collecting is big—there's plenty of ammunition in crates and barrels, and the enemies are constantly dropping items in death—and the currency you amass can be exchanged for upgrades and valuables. With every new weapon, you can tweak categories like power, reload speed, firing speed and capacity, which make an important difference.

Aiming your weapon does take some getting used to, pinpointed with a little red laser sight. The control over direction is extremely precise and requires a skilled touch for your progression as the difficulty ramps up. Sometimes the enemy grows to such immense size, you wonder what the hell you could possibly use to take it down. Take El Gigante, for example: the most intense, visually exciting boss battle I have ever experienced by not just a small margin. This thing starts out by demolishing a group of villagers trying to hold it down with tie ropes—marvel at the animation—crushing them under foot and hand, snapping backs and tossing them like twigs; then it turns its gaze on you. Toss a flash grenade at its gnarled face and witness cinematic-quality animation on a creature the size of the screen as it winces in pain, covering its blinded eyes. As the battle rages, you can dart into shacks for items, watching it demolish your safe spot up close and personal. As you bring it to its knees, feel its mass and weight crumbling in a heart-pounding display of raw power. This colossal beast will eventually uproot trees for use as a baseball bat, swinging away before being distracted by…

By something I dare not give away. What I've seen should humble ordinary game design. What I've played really is a step above anything out there for very specific reasons that I had always imagined would happen with modern game design but have yet to experience until now. Yes, what I've played does have its problems (we'll get to that in the review), but the final impact is unforgettable. Everyone is looking for something a bit different in their games as they become such personal experiences, relying on so many broad little details and nuances to pull us in. Play Resident Evil 4 for yourself and draw your own conclusion. Mine: this is the next defining moment in video games. Brady Fiechter

Let's go chopping...



We're not entirely sure how you'll play a game with something so monstrous, but for the ultimate Resident Evil fan, the way to experience RE4 is with Nubytech's intimidating chainsaw controller. Incorporating faux blood splatters and a sound chip that produces chainsaw sound effects, the controller also comes with a display stand for when not in use. Expect it to hit retail at the same time as the game, with a price of $50.

Exclusive no more

Ever since Resident Evil 4's announcement long ago, Capcom had proclaimed that the game would be exclusive to Nintendo's GameCube. In an interview conducted in 2004, producer Hiroyuki Kobayashi even stated that "on that graphic level, if you want to perform that on any other hardware…you're going to see something totally different. Even with other R&D people, they cannot make anything like that on other platforms. They can only do it for Nintendo systems." Nonetheless, Capcom has recently reversed its position, announcing that Resident Evil 4 will come to PlayStation 2 late in 2005 in the U.S., Japan and Europe. A re-evaluation of the marketplace was cited as the reason for the port, and Capcom execs noted that gamers should expect to see changes in the PS2 version. Whether this means gameplay additions/deletions or just visual differences remains to be seen.

Resident Evil 4

Point of Interest

When the initial RE4 concept was scrapped in favor of the re-imagined version, one of the few things that didn't change was Leon as the hero.

System: GameCube
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Available: January

Interviews

Hiroyuki Kobayashi *Producer*

Background: Kobayashi joined Capcom in 1995 as a programmer on the original Resident Evil. He became a producer in 1998 and promoted to division head in 2003. Since his original involvement in Resident Evil, he has served as producer for the blockbuster titles Devil May Cry and the GameCube version of the original Resident Evil. He has also produced the hit games Dino Crisis 2, Dino Crisis 3 and P.N.03. He is currently working on Killer 7, the stylized hard-boiled action-adventure, featuring striking art-shaded visuals and an intriguing storyline between two men with altering personas. Kobayashi-san wanted to get into the video game industry because he liked games since he was a little boy and wanted to someday make 3D CG movies.

play: If I were to tell you RE4 is showing me signs of the best game I have ever played, how would you respond? Perhaps you are not aware of exactly how great this game is!
Hiroyuki Kobayashi: Ever since we announced RE4 in January of this year (2004), I've grown more and more confident that this really is one of the best out there. We've reworked RE so it's more appealing to gamers overseas, and I am confident that it will go over really well. But hearing all this praise, yes, I do think it is turning out to be a wonderful game.

Now that I have opened with that statement and got you thinking, what would you say defines Resident Evil 4? What was it you had in your mind to set out to achieve when making this latest game in the RE series?
The RE series has gone on, game after game, and people were growing tired of it. There was no excitement. I understood that this is where the series stood, and knew that in order to continue the series any further, it needed a complete, total overhaul.

When you set out to design RE4, what was the first and most important thing you wanted the game to be? After all, this is the first big sequel and an entirely different direction for the RE series.
We were looking to create a new sort of excitement. RE games have always had this great sort of excitement. That's what we thought was most important.

Were there any specific things you all decided must be removed from past Resident Evils, and perhaps replaced with new ideas for a better, more refined experience?
Resident Evil has always focused on the horror element. But that's only natural, because it's "survival horror" after all. But with this game, making the game fun was our top priority, so horror was number two on the list. If you just want pure horror, Resident Evil 1 on the GameCube is a great horror game. As far as what we've taken out, we've removed stuff like the item box and ink ribbons—things that aren't really necessary for or don't really fit in with the gameplay.

I thought it was a fantastic touch to keep little RE elements that keep the spirit of the series, like typewriter saves and herbs for health. In what specific ways have you designed the game to still be very Resident Evil?
Since it is a part of the series, we didn't change anything in the game that didn't need to be changed. However, since everything has evolved, the typewriter screen and how it's used, and the types of herbs and everything, all of that has been

> "We've reworked RE so it's more appealing to gamers overseas, and I am confident that it will go over really well." Hiroyuki Kobayashi, producer

updated.

And what would you say separates the game the most from the past games of Resident Evil?
I'd have to say the pacing of the tempo of the game, the play style and maybe how you feel as you play it.

The world and your design create a perfect illusion of a real place. What kind of special techniques are you using to make everything so unbelievably atmospheric and convincing? You are creating things I have never experienced before in a game, and I am so curious about the thoughts behind your design process.
There aren't really any special techniques at work here. Rather, I think what you're seeing is the dedication of each member of the development staff, and the director making good decisions and judgments. We are definitely blessed to have a top-notch team working on the title, and although it is not an actual, real-world location, thinking of how to breathe life into this fictional world was crucial.

There seem to be more boss battles than we have come to expect from Resident Evil. Am I correct, and what were your team's intentions and motives when designing bosses?
The goal was to have bosses that were necessary in the flow of the game's story, as well as bosses that didn't get repetitive. In designing them, some of the things we think of are how they will fight against Leon, and what kind of shape or form they will take.

"...I think what you're seeing is the dedication of each member of the development staff, and the director making good decisions..."
Hiroyuki Kobayashi, producer

People might not associate the GameCube with providing such detailed graphics. What is unique about Nintendo's system, what are some of the special things you are doing that maybe surprised you or impressed you?
We've been working with the GameCube for a long time, so we are very familiar with the hardware. This is why we were able to use the features needed to make possible those things we wanted to do and wanted to create.

I'm impressed by the pacing of the game, the way you balance mood with straight action, and keep the cinematics quick and abrupt. What are your intentions with pacing and presentation?
For this game, the director has had his own vision for that balance, and I think there is a great fusion between the tempo and pacing and the cutscenes and story elements.

Often sequels are made mostly with fans in mind. Are you focusing on anything specific in hopes to draw a new audience?
We're making it so that it is fun, and so that the story and game content is such that people can jump into the series from this game and not be lost.

I felt intense emotions playing this game. This is very, very rare for me when playing a video game, more like the intensity I get from a good movie. An example, kind of leading off of what I just was getting at, I recall a scene when I'm traveling to the front of the castle. These frightening dogs stood silently in the distance, their glowing eyes piercing the fog. When the lightning flashed, I got a quick glimpse of their frightening form. I didn't want to move at first. I just stared. It was almost like it was waiting for me. What is the key to so deeply drawing off the player's emotions like this?
I'm very happy that you were so moved by the game. I'm not exactly sure what scene that is, but I remember a scene where the dogs first make their entrance. We're using cutscenes and camerawork to surprise the player whenever we introduce new enemies. I think deciding when and where to use these cutscenes to draw the player in emotionally is very important.

How important is the technology of the hardware you are designing on to be able to do all this?
I think that it is impossible to completely realize the vision of the creators, no matter what the hardware is. The important thing is how to use the hardware and technology available to express it as fully as possible.

So you have this amazing setting and movie-like events to pull us in, but you seem very aware of retaining very traditional

gameplay elements. I love stopping and shooting the blue medallions hanging from things, as an example, and collecting things. Why did you include these types of things?
I think some of the elements that make a game a game haven't changed. So to build on this aspect of games, we have included things like the blue medal mini-game.

Would you call this game survival horror still?
The survival aspect is very strong, but there is still horror as well, so yes.

What led to the inclusion of that mysterious merchant and the idea of upgrading weapons and purchasing items? Of course, that's a very new concept for RE.
We did so in order to have more weapon variation as well as a way to use money.

I'm impressed by the sudden intensity of the character reactions when you shoot them, the way they move and animate. Can you talk to me about the animation system you are using, if it is unique or new, and how you are designing the enemies to react to body parts you are shooting?
Since you can aim and shoot at enemies this time around, if we didn't have location-specific reactions or damage, it would defeat the purpose of trying to aim for different areas anyway. So our animators worked hard to give the enemies different reactions for hits to different areas.

Please explain how you are approaching AI design.
The enemies this time around attack as if they are smart, using their minds. Since they are doing different things in different situations, it required about three times as much programming code as normal.

What led you guys to choose Leon to be the lead character?
We picked Leon because he has been popular throughout the series, and because he hasn't been in a game since 1998.

What was the reasoning behind utilizing the active button sequences (like the A button, or pressing L & R)?
We just wanted to keep from having to have a lot of complicated controls to do all of the different actions in the game. This keeps it very simple and focused on the action.

And finally, what led to the idea of including the female character you rescue and guiding her in the world?
We wanted the main character to have to protect something or someone as he fought through the game.

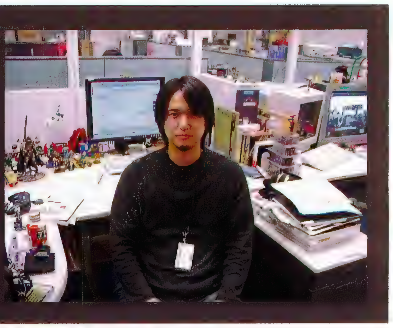
Previous Residence

Resident Evil

Jill, the master of unlocking, will forever live in the hearts of Resident Evil fans. As will recalling the moment we freaked when the hounds crashed through the hallway window. And mixing those green and red herbs for the first time. And seeing those freaky lickers making their entrance in the brilliantly effective CG. And soaking in every square inch of wonderfully detailed prerendered backdrops (hey, for the time it was great). Ok, so the characters moved like driving forklifts, but it was all good when our hearts pounded every time a zombie shambled in. The reimagining on the GameCube is still gorgeous and timeless.

Masaki Yamanaka *Lead character designer*

Background: Masaki Yamanaka has worked on several Resident Evil games, including Resident Evil 3, Resident Evil (GC remake) and Resident Evil 4. His main focuses have been on designing monster animations and character designs.



play: Could you detail your overall design process: things like how you come up with the creations, the personal design decisions you go through?
Masaki Yamanaka: Basically, my job is to use all of the skills of the design team, which includes myself, to bring the characters the director wants to put in the game to life. The workflow goes something like this:

Step 1: Talk with the director and come up with necessary characters for the game. If this isn't done properly up front, it can turn into a big mess later on... We draw the 2D designs to pin down the characters' looks at this time as well.

Step 2: Get the characters in the computer. Character design is about getting the characters into 3D and seeing how they look, how they feel on the screen, meaning that the 2D designs, no matter how good or bad they turn out, are only rough ideas for the final character. The same goes for the animations as well. You can have a bunch of good animations, but you need to actually link them up to see if they connect and transition well or in a natural manner to see how well they actually turned out. So we take the characters we came up with in Step 1 and just get them into the computer to work with.

Step 3: Finish up and polish. Once we get a good idea of the characters with

"What I've played really is a step above anything out there..."

Step 2, each member of the team takes his or her characters and polishes them up. Once this is done, the character design process is over. However, we were able to go through the whole production process, actually moving and controlling the main characters, actually fighting the enemies, making any necessary tweaks along the way.

What, to you, are some of the most important elements that go into making compelling characters to populate the world? In other words, what is the art of character design to you?
Of course, a major selling point of Resident Evil is the realistic world, but that isn't the main concept. Our major focus is on making a fun game, so we are perfectly fine with including things that don't look real at first glance. But that is a delicate balance that all of us designers are constantly faced with. As far as character design techniques go, it isn't about just being able to draw well. Actually, more emphasis is placed on being able to come up with good designs that fit the game's world and story.

When you first sat down with a blank canvas, before any game code was written, what thoughts dominated you?
It all comes down to two things: making something that's just plain fun, and creating something that will make the players say "wow!"

As far as the design process goes, it starts off as more of "what do I want to do?" rather than "what should I be doing?" but always ends up being the opposite in the end. That's the hardest part of being a character designer, whether you can stay on top of that fine line, maintain that balance. So in the beginning, I try to smooth out the rough edges and still aim for something that will impress people.

Previous Residence

Resident Evil 2

The best in the series? Many say yes; I say the more action-oriented presentation and slightly less moody setting left my quietly pounding heart with the original. Raccoon City is now the hunting grounds, and RE4's Leon and Claire are the new unwitting zombie shredders. Umbrella Corporation is being oh so very bad, unleashing a nasty T-virus and new enemies to add to the decimation. The game wasn't really much different in terms of theme and execution from the first, but who cared when all we wanted was more classic Resident Evil?

Yoshihiko Wada *Chief sound designer*

Yoshihiko Wada, chief sound designer Background: Wada studied musical composition in college and, after graduating, he began working at a video game company where he focused on music composition and creating sound effects. After joining Capcom, Wada worked on sound for Devil May Cry as well as sound effects for Viewtiful Joe.

play: Could you detail your overall design process: things like how you come up with the sound, the personal design decisions you go through?
Yoshihiko Wada: I think it is the same no matter what game I work on. But first I think of what the most important sound in the game is. For RE4, that sound was the sound of firing the handgun Leon has at the start of the game. I didn't want it to just sound like Dirty Harry's gun or something. That was the main sound concept this time around.

At first we used our existing sound library, but it just sounded too unrealistic. And it is against the law to fire guns in Japan, so we couldn't actually fire any guns to test or record here. After a bit of trial and error, we finally ended up working with a sound effects company in America, and recorded a bunch of actual sounds from real guns. We took those sounds and edited them here to come up with the final product. I was even able to actually fire some guns in LA. I think it goes without saying that this experience was very meaningful for me in the sound creation process for this game. It's all a balance of real life and imagination, reality and make-believe. I guess you could say that that's my whole creative process.

By the way, there will also be a magnum in RE4. For that gun, you're really getting into Dirty Harry territory, as far as the sound goes. There's also a rocket launcher in the game, but we had to just use our imagination for that, as we were unable to actually fire and record a real one.

Describe to me how you think sound shapes the world we are exploring.
I think the biggest, most defining difference between sound in games and sound in movies or TV is that you have the same sound played over and over in games. For example, in RE4, you'll be firing your handgun over and over throughout the course of the game, and because of that, the sound for firing that gun has to be really cool, really impressive. If it's not, the player will get tired of firing the gun because the sound gets old. In my opinion, a game sound designer's main job is to create and produce sounds that don't get

> "It's all a balance of real life and imagination, reality and make-believe." Masaki Yamanaka, lead character designer

Up for a bit of sniping?

old or monotonous, no matter how many times you hear them. And that goes for all sorts of sounds, like footsteps or doors, not just gunshots.

I am terrifically impressed by the depth and understanding you seem to bring to the sound design in RE. Even simple things like the pop of the 9mm gun, the steady sound of rain, are so convincing and atmospheric. Talk to me about your ambitions and goals designing the sound.

My main belief or conviction in making sounds is making sounds that the player wants to hear, not necessarily what you might hear in real life. I guess you could say that I try to create sounds that you can actually feel, more than just a recording of what things sound like in the real world.

For example, let's look at the sound of footsteps. Try walking, and listen really closely to the sound of your own footsteps. What kind of sound do you hear? First your heel touches the ground, then your toes, right? But what you have to remember is that when your heel touches down, it does so with the force of all your weight. Maybe like a thud or a plop if you put it into words. And say you are walking on small rocks. That sound is going to change. Not all footsteps sound the same, and the force that comes down with each step changes when you start running. That's why you'll hear different footsteps in RE4 for walking and running, rather than speeding up the walking footstep sound to match the running speed. And you'll hear different sounds for the left and right feet. And of course, if you step in a puddle or in water, that sound will be different as well, with a different sound if you are walking on broken glass. Some people may think, is it really necessary to get that detailed? But I say yes, of course it is, because everything starts from walking, from footsteps.

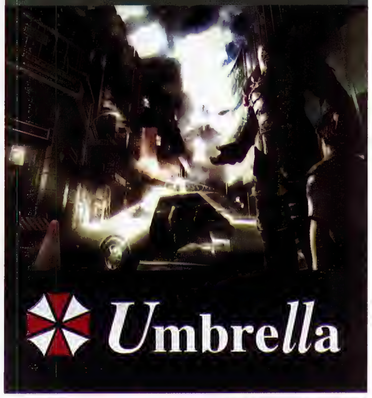
I also always try to pay careful attention to the sounds around me. For example, when I walk, I pay attention to the sound of my own footsteps, and in the fall I listen to the sounds of the insects chirping outside. You may think I'm a little too into my work for saying so, but it really is very interesting, listening to all these different sounds! I think everyone should try, at least once, listening to the little sounds around them, no matter how small or insignificant it seems. You just may discover something really cool.

Incidentally, lately one of my favorite sounds has been the sound of my daughter's voice (four months old). She can't speak in words yet, but the way she "talks" is really cool! And her name just happens to be Suzune, and the kanji characters we use to write it are "cool" (temperature) and "sound." It's a cool-sounding name (pun intended), don't you think?

Previous Residence <<

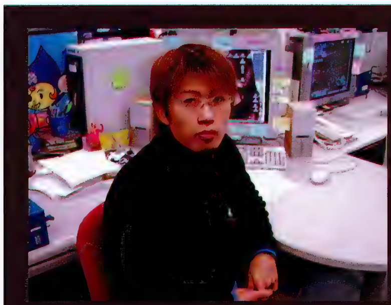
Resident Evil 3

That darned T-virus just wouldn't go away. Neither did the mutations, leading to memorable nasties like central bad guy Nemesis, Grave Digger and the Brain Suckers. The game packed the typically impressive detail only the prerendered graphics of the time could deliver; a return to the police station wasn't too exciting, but the incredibly moody mansion sequence left its mark. While Resident Evil 3 was, without a doubt, a worthy entry into the massive cult following series, the game didn't quite shake us like the first two. Perhaps it was time for a little change...



Resident Evil Code: Veronica

And change it would—into full 3D. Resident Evil Code: Veronica was the first time the series would venture outside PlayStation, on Dreamcast no less. Chris had gone missing, leaving sister Claire Redfield to take charge of the obscure puzzle solving and ammunition conservation. The gameplay hadn't changed much, and the perceived flaws haters of the series pointed to remained, but the quite different look and new depth of presentation helped build the engaging atmosphere. It's easy to argue the case that Code: Veronica was the best in the series, if not lacking in its familiarity.



Yoshiaki Hirabayashi *Event team head*

Background: Hirabayashi joined Capcom in 2001. He has worked on several Resident Evil games including Resident Evil (GC remake) and Resident Evil 0. As part of the Resident Evil remake team, he created models as a designer and worked on some of the cutscenes as well. For Resident Evil 0 and P.N.03, he created facial models for close-ups as well as some of the cutscenes for both titles. Hirabayashi is in charge of the cutscenes for Resident Evil 4 and is a lead designer on the team.

play: Could you detail your overall design process: things like how you come up with the scenes you're creating, the personal design decisions you go through?
Yoshiaki Hirabayashi: Most of the cutscenes are done in real time. Some of them use movies, but all of the story events are done in real time. My main responsibility was to manage the technology and production necessary to make sure that all of these real time cutscenes looked as good as they would if they were pre-rendered cutscenes. And during the process, I had to come up with ways to solve a lot of problems and create new processes for the work to flow. Actually, the greater part of my time was spent keeping the workflow on track.

There are lots of times when we have to push the limits of the hardware, and sometimes our systemized workflow ends up holding us back. When that happens, I'll sit down with the programmers and try and hash out some new ideas. There are roughly 100 cutscenes in the game, give or take a few, and most of them were made possible by these long sessions with the programmers, working out the kinks.

What are you trying to achieve with the cinematic cutscenes? Are you inspired by particular techniques, going for very specific emotion in the player?
The real-time event cutscenes in the Resident Evil series have always required the highest quality in graphics as well as direction and staging, and the same applies for Resident Evil 4. What the director, Mr. Mikami, said he wanted to see from the cutscenes was "this time around, I just want the characters to look cool and interesting." The characters featured in the RE series have always been cool and interesting, so I had meeting after meeting with the director to figure out what direction we needed to take things in order to make the characters appear cooler and more interesting than ever.

In doing so, with all of the various elements that make up these scenes, from the camera work, lighting, animation, etc., it became clear that the most important thing of all for this game was the expressions of the characters themselves. So in making all the cutscenes, our main focus was the characters' expressions, the coolest or most impressive part of the characters. I think that seeing all of these different emotions and expressions will really help the player get more involved in the game and become more invested in it.

Would you say there are certain mistakes you think some designers make when crafting event scenes in video games and that you are trying to avoid? Maybe you can describe to me one of your favorite scenes and why you think it works so well?
Yes, there were. For good or for bad, cutscenes tend to be compared to actual movies. But we know that we can never forget that when it comes down to it, we're making a game here. These cutscenes exist in order to make the game more fun, more enjoyable. They're not there just to look cool. We don't put them in just to put them in.

My favorite scene would have to be the scene with the knife fight. I think it really recreates the tension of a close-quarters knife fight. But at the same time, you can't just put down the controller and watch it to the end. When the enemy charges at Leon, you have to become Leon and dodge the attack. When Leon is putting up a fight, you have to put up a fight too. I don't want to spoil the fun, so I won't get into the details of how this actually works, but I can say that by the time the scene is over, your palms will be plenty sweaty—it's that tense. Cutscenes should be more than just downtime to watch the story progress. I think they can also be interactive and enjoyed as another part of the game. And I think this fight scene is a perfect example of this. **play**

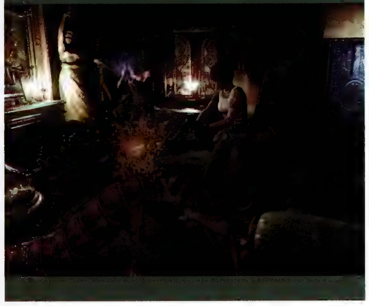
"There are roughly 100 cutscenes in the game, give or take a few..."

Yoshiaki Hirabayashi, event team head

Previous Residence

Resident Evil 0

Here we had the prequel. We also had the weakest Resident Evil in the series—it was definitely time for a big change—and still an experience superior to most of the competition. The game sure did look good—easily outshining all before it—relying on incredible detail in the zombies, typically cinematic presentation—still quite effective, if expected—and eerily atmospheric lighting and details. The story, which traced back through the origins of the T-virus and Umbrella Corporation, was especially fun for RE fans. Switching between two characters was also a nice touch, incorporating some new puzzle solving into the mix.



In 2025, we will still be at
WAR

All natural resources have been exhausted, enemy alliances are strong, and everyone is fighting for what is left. The end of the world is near. You are a renegade soldier, equipped with the ultimate mech weaponry. Your prime mission is to save what is left by taking down enemy armored tanks in strategic co-op play, or head-to-head combat. Play with up to 8 players via Xbox *Live* and battle in 3 different modes of online combat. The future is in your hands…are you ready to fight for it?

GUNGRIFFON®
ALLIED STRIKE

TEEN
T
VIOLENCE
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

ONLY ON XBOX

XBOX

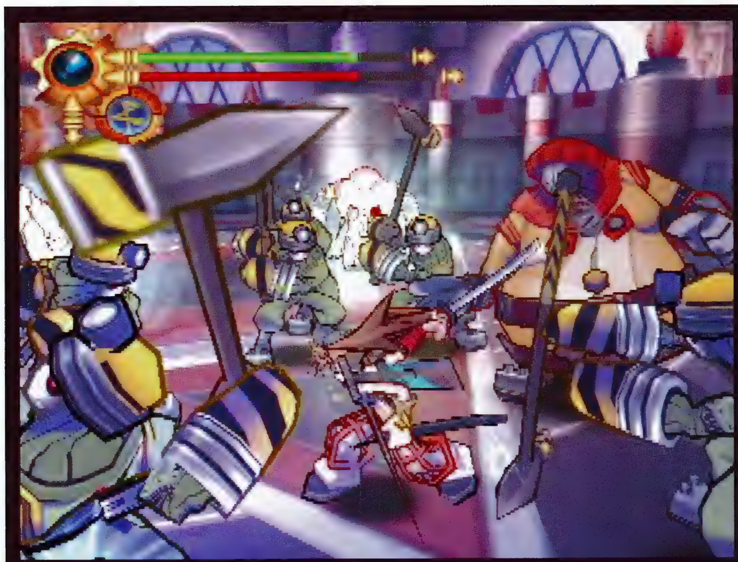
XBOX LIVE ONLINE ENABLED

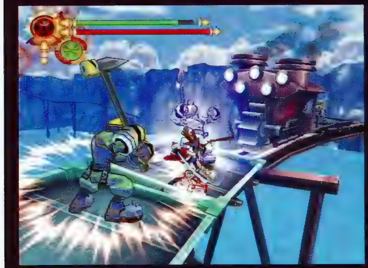
GA GAME ARTS

kama digital entertainment

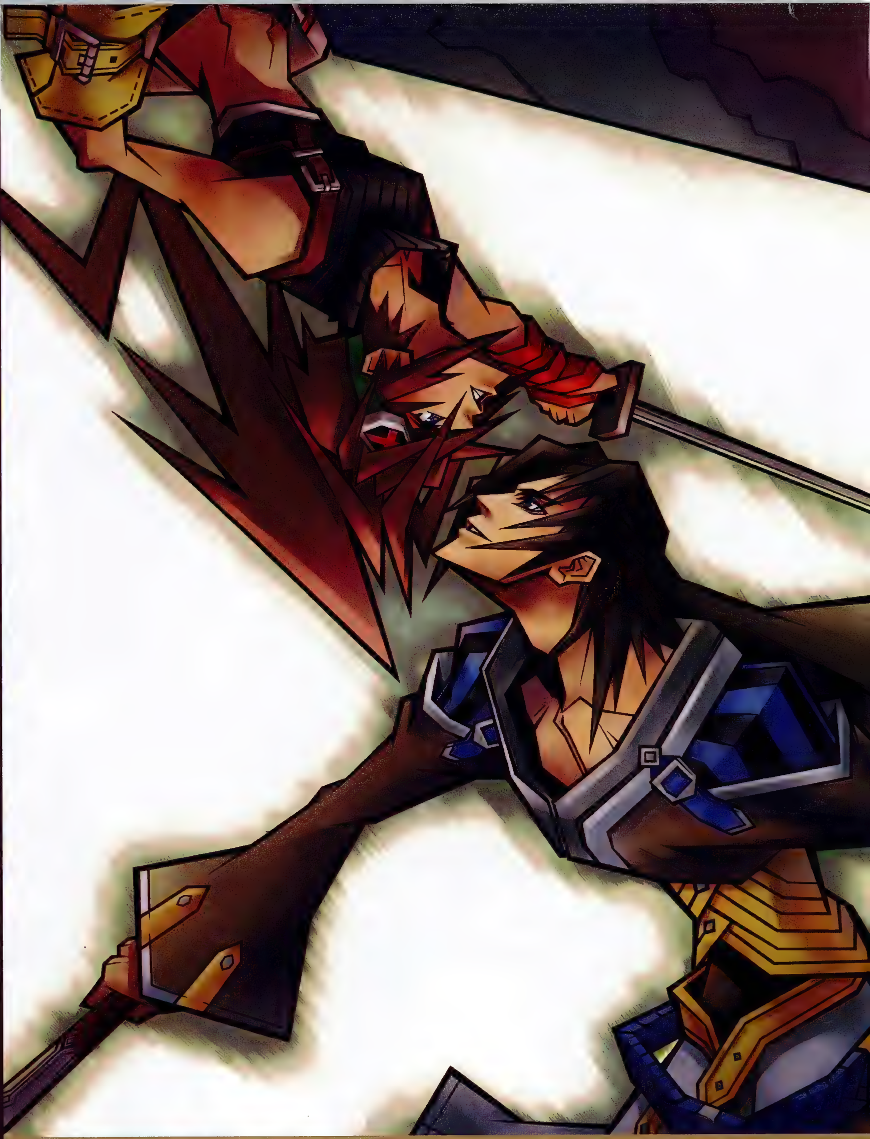
© 2004 TECMO/GAME ARTS/Kama Digital Entertainment. Tecmo and the Tecmo logo are registered trademarks of Tecmo, Ltd. The ratings icon is a trademark of the Interactive Digital Software Association. Microsoft, Xbox, Xbox *Live*, the *Live* logo and the Xbox logos are registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries.

www.TECMOGAMES.com



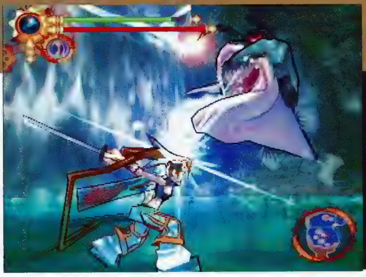


Musashi:
That's right!
Baaaaahahaha!



Musashi
Samurai Legend
Return of the Brave Fencer

Not one, but two new action games from the Square Enix camp within months of each other? Truly a blessing.



When Brave Fencer Musashi arrived on the scene back in 1998, it was like a dream come true. Anyone who'd ever pined for a Square action game would finally experience the world's most renowned RPG developer's take on action…of which the end result was borderline groundbreaking. Little Musashi, sporting hair as big as his body, could double jump and comb newfound polygonal sprawls with the best of 'em, but where the game really shined was in its craggy level design and "Assimilation": Musashi's ability to absorb his enemies' abilities by Fusion and return the favor.

All these years later, Musashi has grown from a kid to a young man, but his methods of Assimilation have remained the same—bolstered by the ability to carry his friends and allies to safety now that he's breached the 3-foot-tall mark. The new game, like the old game, incorporates exploration, action puzzles and platforming, although the look has undergone major manga-ization. To say the game is cel-shaded really doesn't do it justice. What Square Enix coins as "manga shading" is the closest to living 3D cartoons as we've come. Seeing this game in action is truly a sight to behold. Technology has certainly been kind to the young samurai, even if literary prowess has not…

> "Seeing this game in action is truly a sight to behold."

Japanese action-RPGs have never been known for their great stories, and this second installment certainly seems no exception—his ultimate goal is, well, to save a princess—although it's the how and why that saves the day. The land, Vespire, that Musashi has been summoned to save (by the princess) is forged on a creation called the Nebulium Engine, created and lorded over by the ruling party Gandrake Corporation (and its resident megalomaniac head case President Gandrake) who have ambitions of using it to control not only Vespire but…need I even say the word? They've captured her highness; she's summoned Musashi; and well, as you can imagine, it's all about the minions and bit players in between, an area where Square Enix can turn the bland into the sublime. Through mystics, maidens, spirits and a sword for all seasons, Square spins their tale into a Zelda-like ramble with manga overtones, making the journey, although on the whole trite, compelling from beginning to end.

Not so long ago games of this pedigree were greatly anticipated, much like the licensed and/or over-hyped drivel of today—a telling barometer of how much the industry has changed (for the worse). I'm as, if not more, excited for this sequel than I am anything on the horizon, save maybe Zelda and Conker. I never thought the words "sleeper hit" and Square (or Enix) would ever be uttered in the same breath, however, this may be the case with Musashi. The Square Enix brand may be the key in driving the masses beyond the bandwagon to something a little more innocent and a whole lot more fun.

Dave Halverson

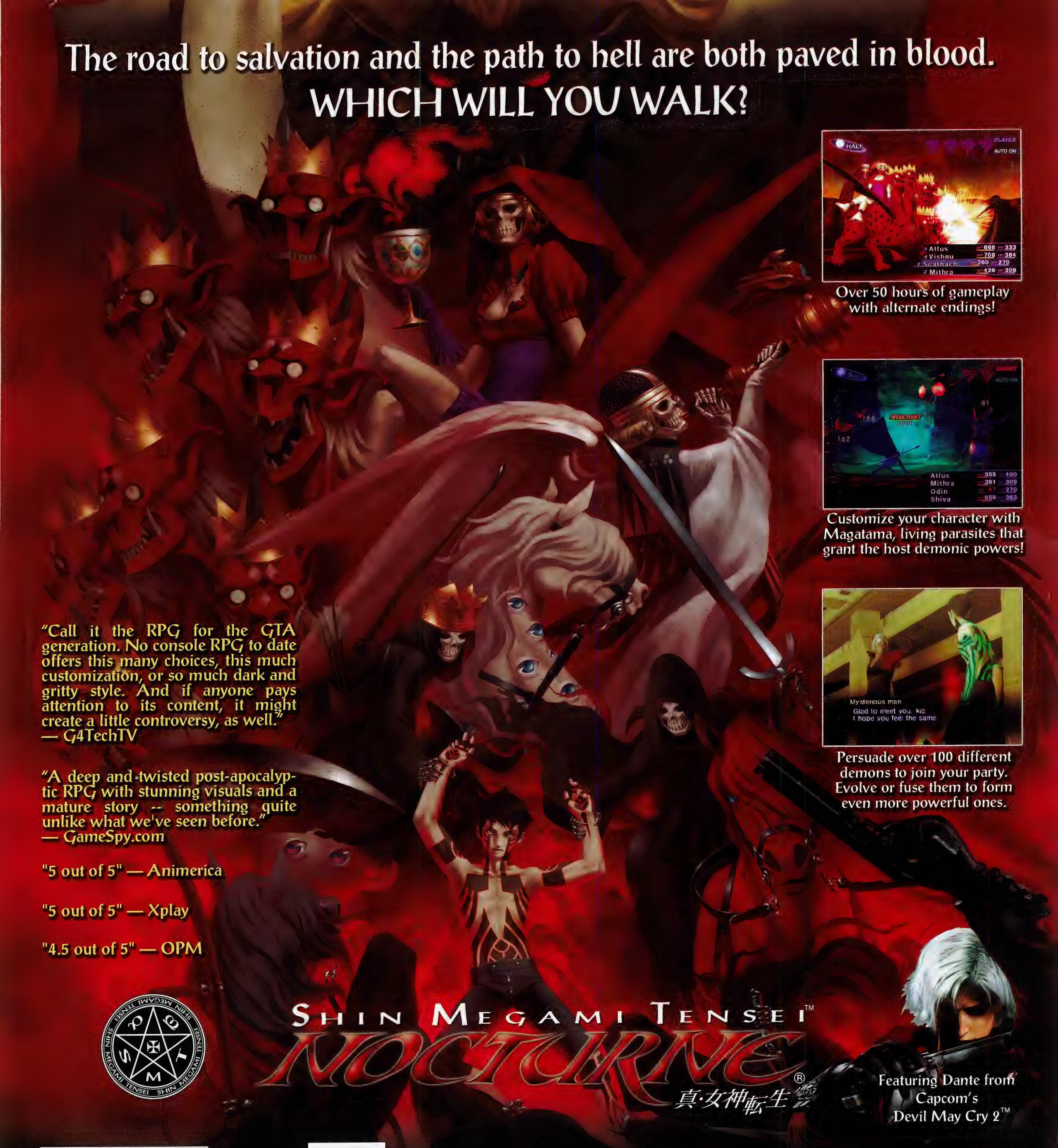
Musashi: Samurai Legend

Point of Interest

This is one of those games that screens cannot do justice. Seeing Square Enix's manga-shaded characters in motion is astonishing.

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Square Enix
Publisher: Square Enix
Available: Early 2005

The road to salvation and the path to hell are both paved in blood.
WHICH WILL YOU WALK?



Over 50 hours of gameplay with alternate endings!

Customize your character with Magatama, living parasites that grant the host demonic powers!

Mysterious man
Glad to meet you, kid.
I hope you feel the same

Persuade over 100 different demons to join your party. Evolve or fuse them to form even more powerful ones.

"Call it the RPG for the GTA generation. No console RPG to date offers this many choices, this much customization, or so much dark and gritty style. And if anyone pays attention to its content, it might create a little controversy, as well."
— G4TechTV

"A deep and twisted post-apocalyptic RPG with stunning visuals and a mature story -- something quite unlike what we've seen before."
— GameSpy.com

"5 out of 5" — Animerica

"5 out of 5" — Xplay

"4.5 out of 5" — OPM

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI™
NOCTURNE®
真·女神転生

Featuring Dante from Capcom's Devil May Cry 2™

MATURE 17+
M
Blood
Intense Violence
Language
Sexual Themes
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

PlayStation®2

RPG

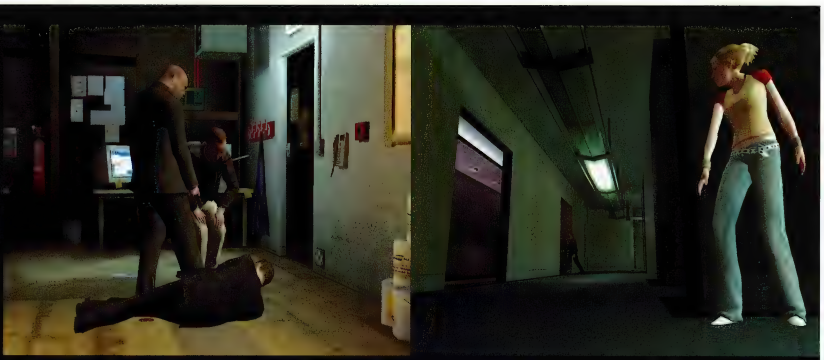
ATLUS®
WWW.ATLUS.COM

© 2004 Atlus SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI and SMT are trademarks of Atlus USA. NOCTURNE® is a trademark of Terminal Reality, Inc. and is used with permission; all rights reserved. DANTE from Devil May Cry 2 : © CAPCOM CO., LTD. 2003 ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.
"PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. The ratings icon is a trademark of the Interactive Digital Software Association. All rights reserved.

The Getaway

Black Monday

Monday, bloody Monday



Not so tough to make out what's going on here. Black Monday is full of sneaky bits as well as all-out gunplay.

I like Black Monday a lot…so I'm extra pissed off that I have to compensate for its ass controls. I've never been so at odds with a game. How can a game so well produced, written and scripted, encompassing such compelling mission objectives, ship with controller-jettisoning quirks that, given this game's pedigree, should have been wiped clean off the hard drive? But I digress, momentarily…

The first Getaway was, to say the least, ambitious, what with recreating London down to the cobblestone and all, but unfortunately was akin to some seriously awkward controls and messy missions. Still, it proved there was life after GTA (in a *Snatch* sort of way) and made its mark as Sony's version of the same. Enter the second game, Black Monday, a down-and-dirty look from the PD's side of the fence, and you'd think the first item on the repair invoice would be said controls, however, apparently someone missed a memo because, once again, the camera acts as if our super cop is flanked by taut rubber bands. Looking in any direction triggers a quick rebound to the middle position that in tight spaces wreaks havoc on precision gameplay, and getting him to merely come to rest in a desired direction is an exercise in tedium. A strafe helps (a slow, limited mobility strafe), but ultimately this engine is just inherently flawed. The action itself is well scripted and acted (cover your ears though kids; this lot throws out the F-word like it's going out of style), the graphics are at their gritty best and the cinematic undertones work over time, but the game is as finicky as they come.

Moving onto the streets, we find things equally askew. Here we have painstakingly realistic thoroughfares (although the textures pop abruptly) on which the missions beg for speed, but the traffic, which is often limited to a single lane, moves at a crawl. If one were to obey the traffic laws, Black Monday would be a 200-hour-long, very sad game. If you're going to make me chase or tail assorted perps, at least give me a wee opening. It doesn't help that they've dotted every corner with rigid steel stoplights either. Quite often when you're in a pinch, there's literally nowhere to go but through unassuming tiny Euro cars or over people. And where's the realism in that? In real life, the authorities would drop a friggin' bomb on your head for the offenses you have to commit to get around in this game. And did I mention that the driving controls are so touchy that breaking wind on the analog could send you into a tailspin, or the constant barrage of enemy cars that act like traffic torpedoes?

So why is it exactly that no matter how many times I find myself redoing missions for reasons beyond my control that I like this game? Balls…the game has got some serious hot buttered Guy Ritchie-style Euro raunch going on, and the troubled cop at the helm is just the kind of freak on a leash I find it a pleasure to use and abuse. Man, can this guy take a lot of lead, and dish it out with the kind of abandon that makes him an everyman's badass. I'll take this underworld debauchery stuff to GTA's hip-hop sludge any day of the week. For God's sake man, clean this mess up and take your place on the throne already.

Dave Halverson

The Getaway: Black Monday

Point of Interest

If SCEE can calm down their jumpy camera, Black Monday could give GTA a run for its money...but don't hold your bloody breath.

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: SCEE Team Soho
Publisher: SCEA
Available: January

> "…the game has got some serious hot buttered Guy Ritchie-style Euro raunch going on…"

SEE THE GAME THE WAY HE SAW IT.
PlayStation 2
989 SPORTS
GRETZKY NHL 2005
EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence
OFFICIAL LICENSED PRODUCT
WAYNE GRETZKY FOUNDATION
NHLPA
ONLINE BROADBAND AND DIAL-UP
989 SPORTS
PlayStation 2
LIVE IN YOUR WORLD.
PLAY IN OURS.

He saw it all. With Gretzky™ NHL® 2005, you can too. See yourself as The Great One, from four different teams. See yourself break his records with Gretzky Challenge. See yourself play others online or in Rivalry Mode. And with EyeToy's™ USB camera, you can even see yourself as yourself.

Online play requires Internet connection, Network Adapter (for PlayStation 2) and Memory Card (8MB) (for PlayStation 2) (each sold separately). NHL, National Hockey League, the NHL Shield and the Stanley Cup are registered trademarks of the National Hockey League. All NHL logos and marks and NHL team logos and marks depicted herein are the property of the NHL and the respective teams and may not be reproduced without the prior written consent of NHL Enterprises, L.P. ©2004 NHL. Officially licensed product of the National Hockey League. National Hockey League Players' Association, NHLPA and the NHLPA logo are trademarks of the NHLPA and are used under license by Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. ©NHLPA. Officially Licensed Product of the National Hockey League Players' Association. All rights in the Gretzky name and trademarks are owned by Wayne Gretzky and WDG Enterprises, Inc. ©2004 Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. 989 Sports, 989 Sports logo and "Live In Your World. Play In Ours." are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc.

Xenosaga Episode II

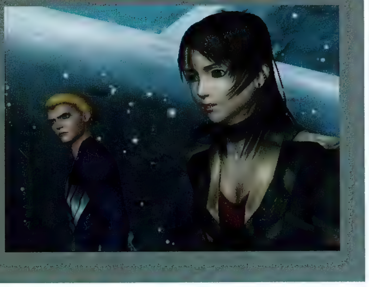
Jenseits von Gut und Böse

A fascinating web of sci-fi action and intrigue

"The opening scenes…contain more awesome action and intrigue than many entire RPGs."

Xenosaga Episode II begins with a flashback set 14 years prior to the events in Episode I. Occurring amidst the Miltian conflict the event that helped set the stage for everything our heroes have encountered thus far the tone is set almost immediately with an astounding aerial mech battle, where spiraling, weaving contrail patterns beautifully dance over a vast, glowing cityscape. This Zone of the Enders-like sequence is shortly followed by an exquisite man-to-man sword battle, where move and countermove are perfectly choreographed like only the Japanese can do. The opening scenes of Xenosaga Episode II: Jenseits von Gut und Böse contain more awesome action and intrigue than many entire RPGs.

Aside from being a strong storytelling device and a good excuse for fantastic cutscenes, Episode II's flashback also serves to introduce players to the numerous new elements being added to the Xenosaga universe. Chief among them are new characters Jin Uzuki (Shion's brother and a former soldier) and Canaan (a non-playable artificial human who is crucial to the story), as well as the ES battle robots. More angular and dynamic than the AGWSs, the ES mechs are far more



powerful and contain an organic element called the "Vessel of Anima." When I asked a Namco employee if they were something like Evangelions, he just smiled knowingly. Unlike Episode I, the ES robots have battles completely separate from man-to-man combat, giving the game a better flow.

Speaking of man-to-man battles, the system has been altered quite a bit, as hitting enemies in certain height zones (corresponding to different button presses) is the secret to breaking down their defenses, and chaining characters' attacks via the boost gauge is a critical offensive tool. Characters can also team up for special attacks or ether combos. The skill system has been revamped as well, as a complex skill tree lets players unlock new powers as multiple pools of ability points are accrued. Unfortunately, even though you can transfer data from Episode I, you'll have to level up and learn all those abilities over again—it's back to square one.

Back in the present, the story picks up where Episode I left off—with Shion, KOS-MOS, Ziggy, chaos, Jr., MOMO and the Elsa crew (and Allen) arriving on Second Miltia. A reprieve is at hand, but the peace doesn't last long as personal drama rears its head between Shion and her brother, and enemy U-TIC mechs come after MOMO, desperate for the data encoded within her subconscious. From there, the action only intensifies and broadens to a galactic scope, punctuated by an impressive score by Yuki Kajiura (of .hack//Sign fame). Fans of Xenosaga Episode I have a lot to look forward to when the sequel hits in a couple months, and if you didn't play the original, there's never been a better time.

Chris Hoffman

Xenosaga Episode II:
Jenseits von Gut und Böse

Point of Interest

Uploading your Xenosaga I save data unlocks new items in Episode II. One such item is a swimsuit for Ziggy; it makes him stronger…and in battle he appears with a snorkel.

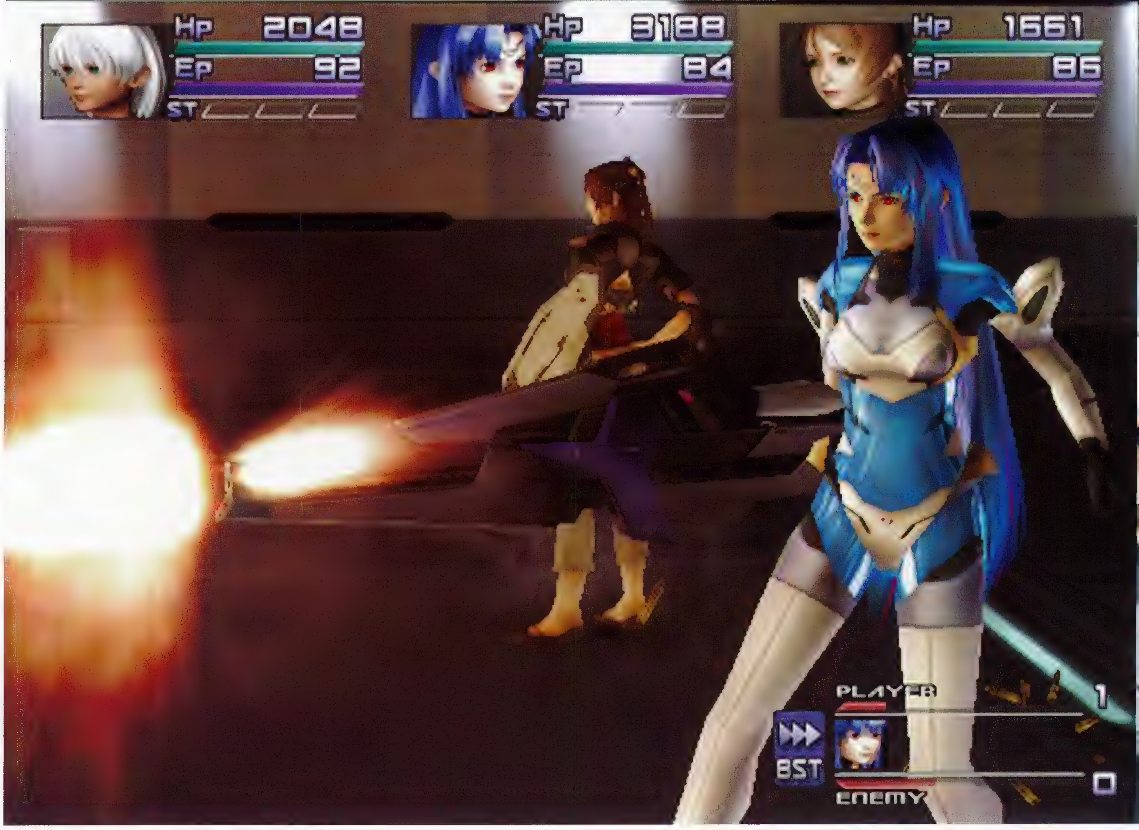
System: PlayStation 2

Developer: Monolith Software

Publisher: Namco

Available: February

> "More angular and dynamic than the AGWSs, the ES mechs are far more powerful..."



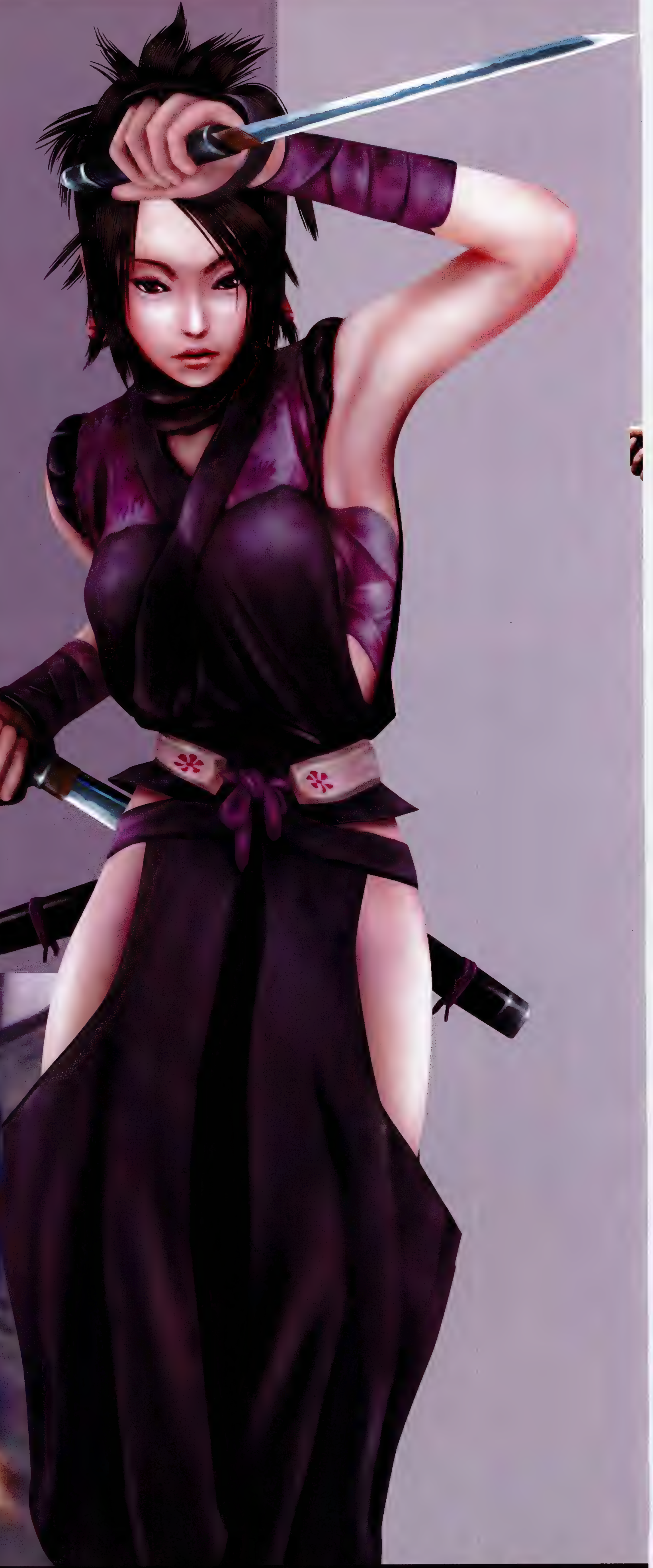
Left: KOS-MOS has a new look and new weapons to bring into battle.

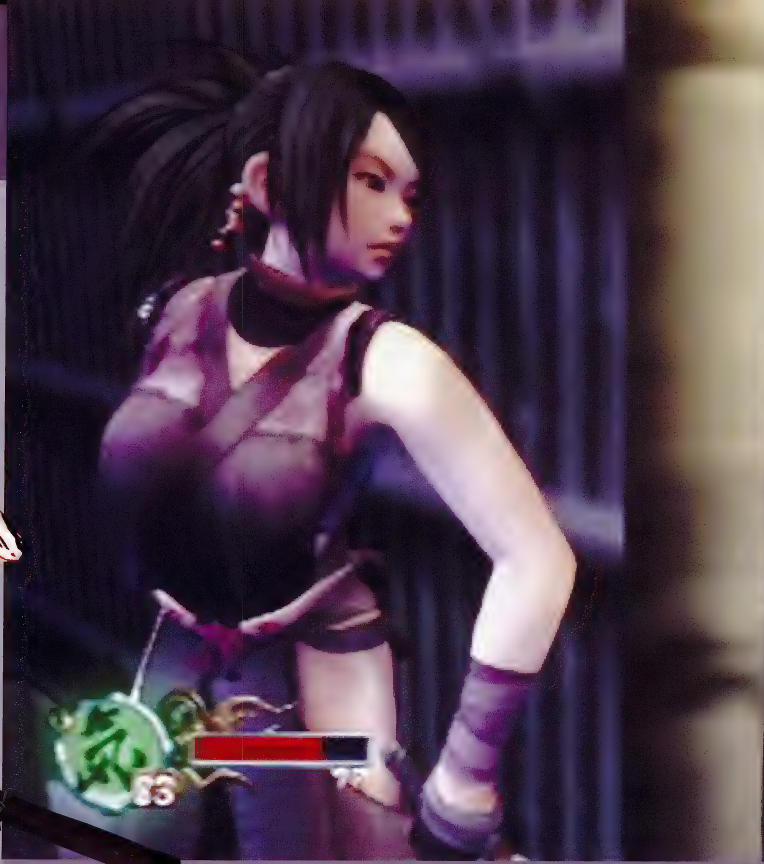
TENCHU
Fatal Shadows

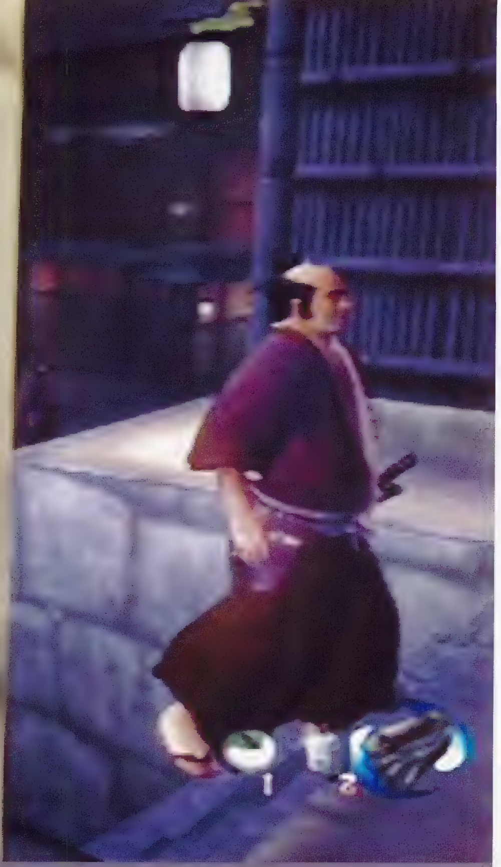
Shadow dancers

As good a game as Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven was, it clung tightly to its linear, rather unforgiving stealth roots. In order for a second Tenchu on this round of hardware to not only succeed but propel the brand forward, K2 would need to spruce things up considerably, which they have just in time for Sega to fly the series' blood-soaked banner.

The biggest change comes by way of splitting the action between two female leads: the lovely Ayame, finally emerging from Rikimaru's shadow, and newcomer Rin, a young acrobatic tomboy ninjette on a collision course with destiny after a tumultuous turn of events mistakenly pits her against Ayame. Trading missions among parallel storylines, the pairing makes for an intoxicating mélange of elegant ninja action heaped on top of strides made in the areas of both core mechanics and visuals. While diehard fans will find the stealth in Fatal Shadows as good as if not better than its predecessors, the ability to hold your own when discovered via lock-on fighting adds needed dimension to the game. Not only does it lessen the frustration of having to do levels over, but various shades of blowing the girls' cover keeps things interesting. Stealth-killing those aware of your presence and hiding their corpses to cover your trail, for instance, can save your ranking, while the temptation to clumsily plow through each mission, killing anything in your path is kept at bay by the resulting pittance







you'll receive. As a buffer, K2 leaves the difficulty adjustment per mission to the player and allows countless replays once a level is clear, so bungled missions can ultimately be mastered, yielding the many accoutrements needed to harness the true breadth of the missions ahead—very wise game design indeed.

The playfields have undergone some major reconstruction as well. Substantially wider and less linear, the grand diversity of areas invite different methods of attack or stealth to suit individual preference, in sync with a much broader range of objectives. In other words, this isn't just another game of Tenchu. Aesthetically things have progressed nearly on par with the gameplay, beginning with a long overdue water upgrade, likely prompted by the new ability to submerge and breathe through bamboo shoots in the game's super-cool water stealth. Animated textures make the scene too, via a network of subterranean caverns that will have you spellbound, and as you'd expect, the lead models have been appropriately juiced. The new Ayame is especially noteworthy. She's always been one of the nimblest and fun-to-control characters around, but now she's draped with more convincing ninja dress and rendered smoother than ever; too bad they didn't go the extra mile and finally properly affix her to the environments. Negotiating sloped surfaces, she and Rin both either sink into the polys below (often knee deep) or float precariously above the surface. This is especially unfortunate given that the direct competition, Red Ninja, has seen fit to include proper body animation right out of the gate. One thing that hasn't changed is the traditional Japanese chamber music pinging sharply under layers of acoustic guitar—one of the very best, most distinctive running soundtracks in all of gaming. Tenchu: Fatal Shadows marks a new beginning for gaming's most quixotic stealth experience. With Sega and From Software behind the brand, the prognosis is a long, prosperous life, but first, I'd like an Xbox version of this one... Dave Halverson

Tenchu: Fatal Shadows

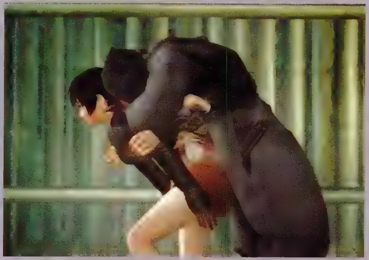
Point of Interest

K2 is comprised of Square, Capcom and SNK alumni, which explains why the last two Tenchus have been so exceptional.

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: K2/From Software
Publisher: Sega
Online: None
Available: March

"...the pairing makes for an intoxicating mélange of elegant ninja action..."

When killing is your only option, it is wise to hide the body quickly.



Star Wars

Knights of the Old Republic II

The Sith Lords

Ladies and gentlemen: dust off your lightsabers

For those of you that liked the original Knights of the Old Republic, you'll want to check out KOTOR II: The Sith Lords. For those of you who didn't play the first KOTOR, go beat the game and then play KOTOR II. I'm serious. Get out your Jedi robes and buckle your seatbelts, because KOTOR II: The Sith Lords is going to Force choke you in the coolest way possible.

The sequel to what was one of the best games of all time is shaping up to surpass its predecessor and improves on many of the first game's faults. Obsidian Entertainment did an amazing job building on the story from the first KOTOR in a seamless, transitional manner. When the game loads in and you hear that unforgettable John Williams theme and read that gold, scrolling text, a wash of inspiration just wells inside you and you can't help but beam with pride. Speaking of load times, you'll find that the dreadful load times from the original have been polished a bit. You're still going to load, just not nearly as long.

Your journey begins five years after the events in the first KOTOR, outside a little fuel-mining planet named Peragus II. You start the prologue as T3-M4; some may recall him as a party member in the original KOTOR. Your objective? Fix the Ebon Hawk and get it to Peragus so your main character can receive medical attention. Apparently the Sith aren't too happy with your existence, since you're the last Jedi, and want to turn you to the Dark Side or destroy you. Either way, we're in for one rollicking good time.

Our preview version of the game consisted of the prologue and one planet. After the brief intro with T3-M4, you're given control of your main character. There you'll find the same three classes as the first KOTOR: Sentinel, Guardian and Consular. The portrait selection is a little more varied than the original, but still limited to approximately 30 pictures (male and female combined) you can assign to your face. An interesting facet of KOTOR II is that my female character walked like a woman and stood like one, hip slightly cocked to one side. Playing as a man, you walk with a more forceful (no pun intended) march. Visually, the game has the same look as the original, but due to the demo's brevity, it's too early to make an official call on the visuals. I'll assume though, that KOTOR II will be firing on all cylinders when it's released.

Combat hasn't changed much since the original, making battle fun and strategic. The combat boxes below your character have been pared down, putting special attacks on the same wheel as regular attacks. You have 60 new feats and force powers, making your leveling choices throughout the game a bit more focused.

> "...KOTOR II: The Sith Lords is going to Force choke you in the coolest way possible."

> "...not only will your choices affect yourself, but everyone around you as well."

The weapon upgrade system in the first KOTOR was left slightly lacking, but has been retooled to allow for items to not only be upgraded, but to also be broken down into components required to craft new items. Hate getting useless loot from lockboxes? Head to a workbench and break it down to make computer spikes or new armor. This system makes upgrading easier and more varied. T3-M4 also proves much more useful, as he doubles as a rolling workbench.

The first planet enthralled me; however, it wasn't the graphics (which were great but fairly monotonous in the mining facility), the voice work or the upgrade system that excited me most about the game. It was the simple fact that, although I spent a good portion of my day sweating out the Peragus II mining facility and only ran into three human beings, I felt compelled to keep unraveling the mystery of my presence on the Ebon Hawk.

There was a strange old woman named Kreia, whom I had a strange connection with (much like you did with Bastila in the original); Atton, a scoundrel in Peragus II (I'm still not sure whether to befriend him or not); and a really creepy Sith named Darth Sion that looks (as Atton puts it) "like he sleeps with vibroblades." I also met a *very* interesting HK droid. I wanted more information from the second I began, even though I only had four entities to speak to, whereas my first KOTOR experience was an entirely different story. Now, I'll be honest and say that I thought the opener to the original KOTOR was extremely slow, but this game fixes that by engaging you in a fairly decent-paced opener.

It's the little details that make this game what it is…your precognition power, telling you when you might want to save the game, your main character waving at you as you roll by a glass window as T3-M4. The voice acting is impressive, and the musical score builds intensity when it needs to, and works so well that you never know it's there, it just silently wills you to move through Peragus II.

What's really excellent though is that this time around, LucasArts and Obsidian promise that not only will your choices affect yourself, but everyone around you as well. You can only imagine the havoc you can wreak having not only yourself working for the Sith, but your entire party. Sweet mother of Skywalker, an entire party of good (or evil!) minions that hang on your every choice…if that doesn't excite you, check your pulse.

We'll have to see how the final version fleshes itself out, but from what it looks like from this crow's nest, it's quickly becoming better and more immersive than its predecessor. Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to pick up my Jedi robes from the dry cleaning place up the street.

Ashley Esqueda

Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords

Point of Interest

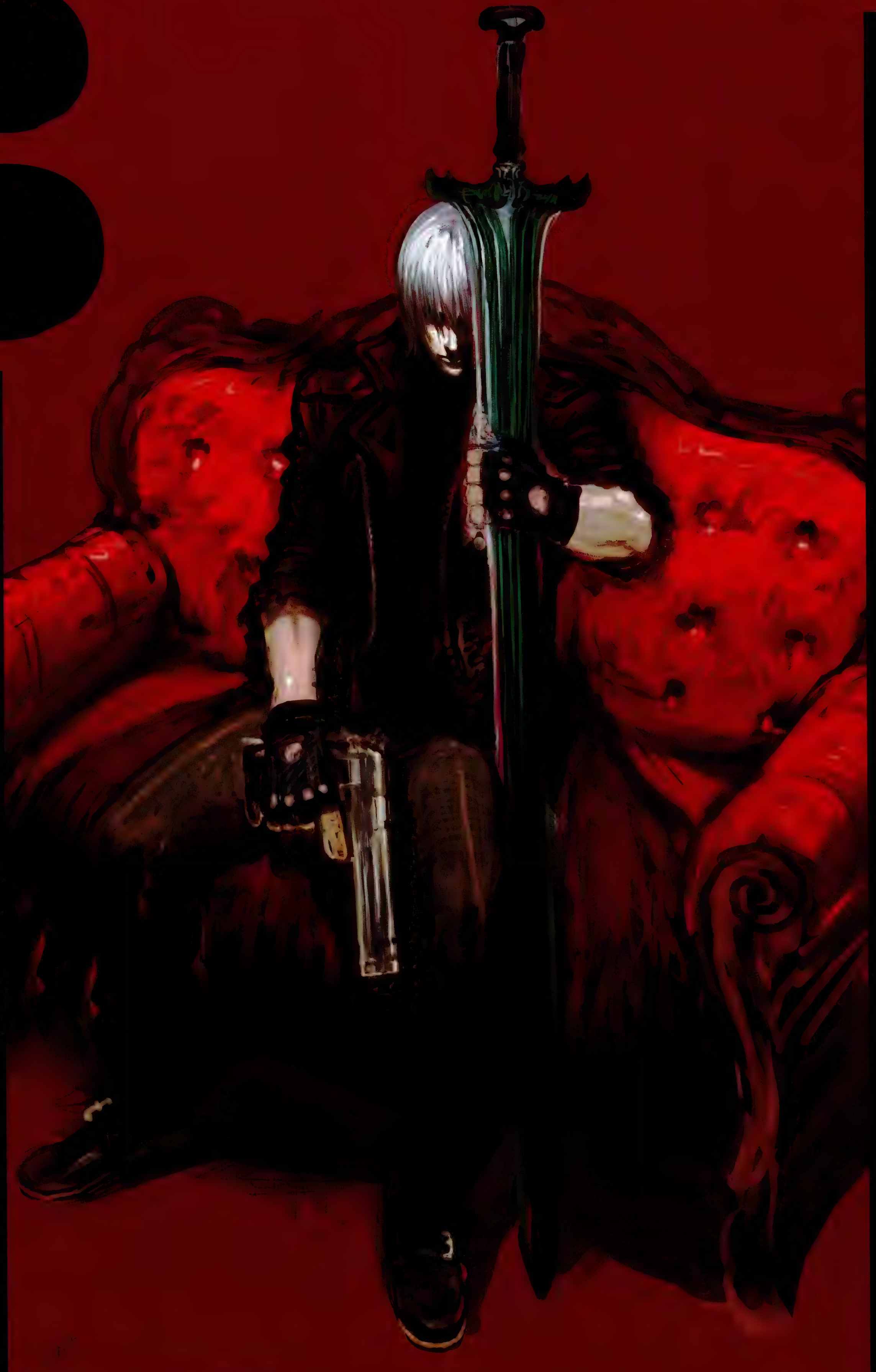
Original KOTOR developer BioWare handed the reins over to Obsidian so they could focus on their original RPG property, Jade Empire.

System: Xbox, PC
Developer: Obsidian Entertainment
Publisher: LucasArts
Available: December (Xbox), February (PC)

The costume designs and environments once again retain that distinct Star Wars feel.

Devil May Cry 3

The series gets a bit of a makeover to fine effect



No matter how you received the redirected Devil May Cry 2, the series has too many cool ideas to leave behind for good. In this obviously improved sequel, a new, very impressive engine is just the beginning of the Gothic goodness. Demon hunter Dante's back, introducing us to his plight well before the events in the last two games. Entering the picture is twin-brother Vergil, who clashes in extreme enmity that runs throughout the story of the game. Flowing with the blood of demons themselves, the pair's twisted altered forms were designed by Atlus' Kazuma Kaneko, known for his work on the Megami Tensei franchise, creating characters in series such as Shin Megami Tensei, Devil Summoner and Persona.

So the game undeniably looks awesome, aggressively stylized and exaggerated in its dark themes. Dante feels instantly familiar with his wild, combo-heavy attacks, but from the start you're treated with a new freedom of customization. Fighting styles are your call: Trickster grants you more speed and evasion, with moves like zipping up walls, while Gunslinger is more appropriate for longer-distance weapons combat, with brutal attacks like independent dual weapon blasts and shotgun specials; flashy nunchuks are also a new alternative to the guns and blades. Royal Guard sets you up for defense and counter attacks—block enough times and you can return a charged explosion. And most definitely satisfying is the Sword Master approach,

Whatever Capcom is doing to crank out this level of visual euphoria...don't stop!

> "...a new, very impressive engine is just the beginning of the Gothic goodness."

which brings you in close and personal with devastating blade attacks and big juggle combos. While I haven't come to grips with all the new acrobatics and techniques, the game right off the bat seems to really go quite deeper than before. As in the previous episodes, you'll be rated at the end of the level for your adherence to crazy style and varied moves.

As the game opens, Dante is setting up shop to build his demon-slaying business. Before he can even settle in and make a payment to actually call the place his own, all hell breaks loose as a crop of demons decimates the premises. There's a lot more interaction going on this time around, for sure, and one-liners set out to alter the tone of what we're setting out to do. After this kinetic setup, it's off to a variety of locations, from a nightclub to city streets to a river and the always-welcome church. Whatever your feelings toward Devil May Cry 2, this is a whole new stage to take on the demon apocalypse. Brady Fiechter

Devil May Cry 3

Point of Interest

The demons in the game were once humans, formed in hell from their past sins like greed and lust.

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Available: March

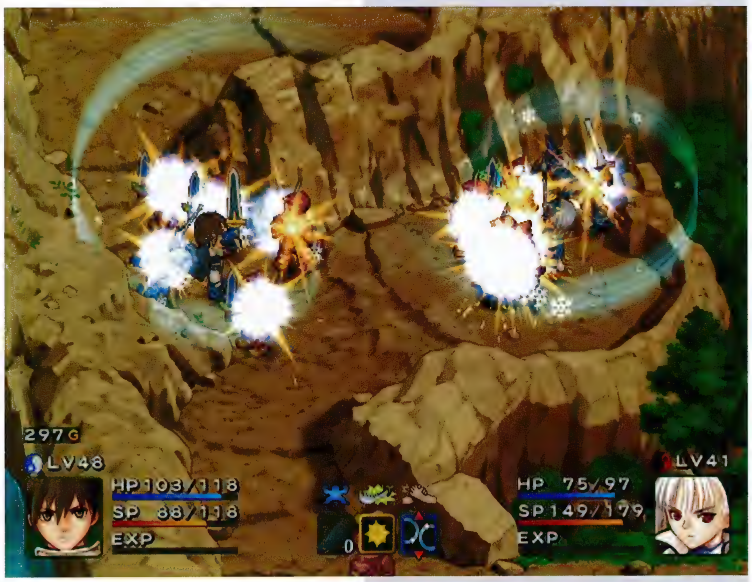
SHINING TEARS

Shining star for you to see

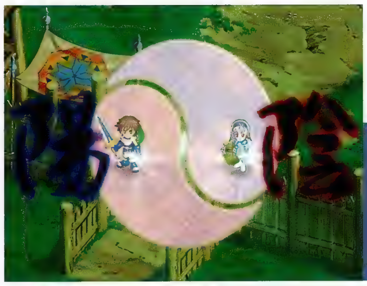
Welcome to the old-school litmus test. The latest installment in Sega's much-beloved Shining series, Shining Tears is a 16-bit game in a 128-bit body…a true-blue Japanese action-RPG to the core, dressed in the stuff of hand-drawn dreams. Depending on your state of mind, this is either music to your ears or like nails scraping across a chalkboard. The story is as you would expect, trite and cheerfully written sans voice-over, about a teenage boy, Xion, found washed up on the shore of a strange city by a pretty young Elvin lass, Elwyn, who helps nurse him back to health in the local pub/warrior HQ, run by a talking wolf named Volg.

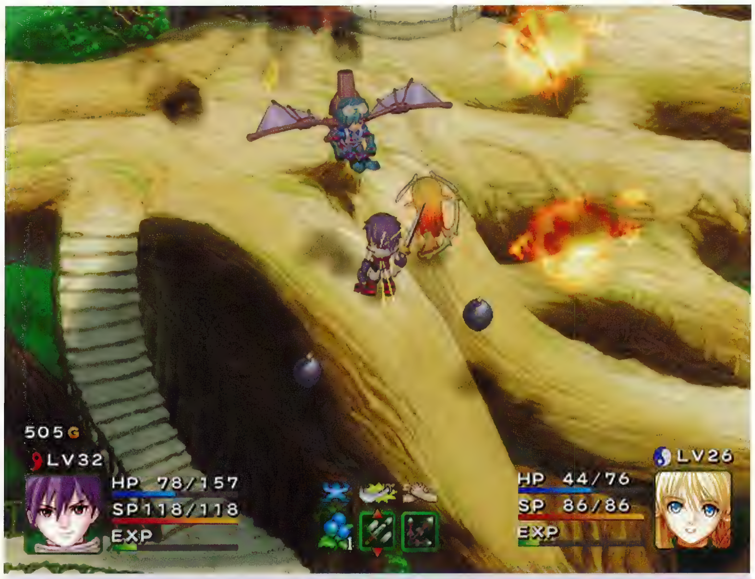
Once Xion is cognizant, the game's simple catalyst is unveiled: he's got amnesia, possesses a pair of magical rings that when worn by two produce amazing power, and is surrounded by an eclectic mix of displaced warriors. Offering his assistance to the good doctor who patched him up, to repay his and Elwyn's room and board, the pushy but shapely Elwyn decides she deserves payment for her rescue services and so she and Xion both enter the doctor's employ and set out on their first job gathering healing herbs in a nearby region known for its battle tutorial. And you'll never guess what happens next, but I'll give you a hint: monsters! And so it begins.

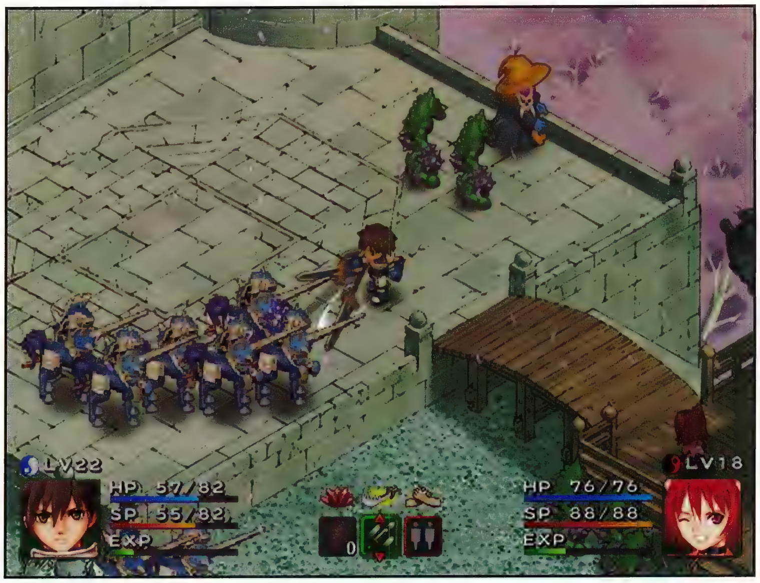
From these humble beginnings and



"…a true-blue Japanese action-RPG to the core, dressed in the stuff of hand-drawn dreams."







meager quarters, Xion, his magical rings and a growing arsenal of rogue warriors will attempt to fend off overwhelming odds and save the fortress city of Shildia as it falls under siege, which translates to choosing the best character for the job and diving into an array of beautiful overhead maps to clear clusters of monsters utilizing traditional means and the game's newfound core mechanic. With your two characters tethered to separate analogs (which is too cool, by the way), the base action involves hacking away with your sword or powering it up to unleash an evolving array of special strikes, but the real key is teamwork. Playing alone or multiplayer using the power of the rings, characters can ensnare enemies by holding a shoulder button and drawing a space between them and as many monsters as possible and letting fly. Depending on your cohort, the spells range in type and evolve throughout the quest, so the secret becomes knowing thy enemy. The undead, for instance, can be easily laid to rest by the Priestess Ryuna and so on. During each skirmish, items, elements and expelled coins (16-bit monsters die in a flurry of coins; it's a fact) are collected to use in conjunction with the city appraiser, smithy, tool and weapons shop, and that's the whole shootin' match. You get a ton of cool characters to manage using the impeccable Climax yes/no equipping interface (Nextech does a great Climax impression), an ongoing story that ties into every species on the menu and, of course, a sweeping score to tie it all together.

While the game revolves around a single region surrounding a single city, the number of areas is quite numerous, as are the regions of Shildia itself—if only it were a seamless stronghold. Falling on the PS2 double-edged sword, on the one hand, more people will be exposed to Shining Tears, but on the other, it's plagued by loading screens where there should be none. In a perfect world, the beautifully painted areas of the city would be connected and freely zoomed, but rather they exist in pockets interrupted by approximately 10-second loading screens. Not the end of the world, but problematic nevertheless. The other fairy in the ointment is the time it takes to level up once the action begins to really heat up. Because the enemy AI ratchets up faster than the players, it's necessary to step into the Heroes' Hearth magic mirrors where time stands still in the real world while you replay won battles over again (a guise for leveling up) to stockpile money and elements to outfit your many needy allies. If you like your RPGs long and drawn out and enjoy the tedium of equipping a small army in drawn-out spurts, this will really float your boat, but at the end of the day, it's artificial length: a byproduct of this era that needs to stay in the past.

Those quirks aside, if it's old-school action-role playing you're looking for, Shining Tears is a beautiful, addicting, insanely deep, time-sucking escapade that will take you back to that magic era of gaming past. Not that I want or would buy into more than a few of these a year—modern game design is clearly superior—but it's imperative we never lose sight of these wonderfully simplistic tales. In 2005, we're already promised a new Ys and Shining Tears. In the wake of yet another echelon of gaming, a welcome sight indeed.

Dave Halverson

Shining Tears

Point of Interest

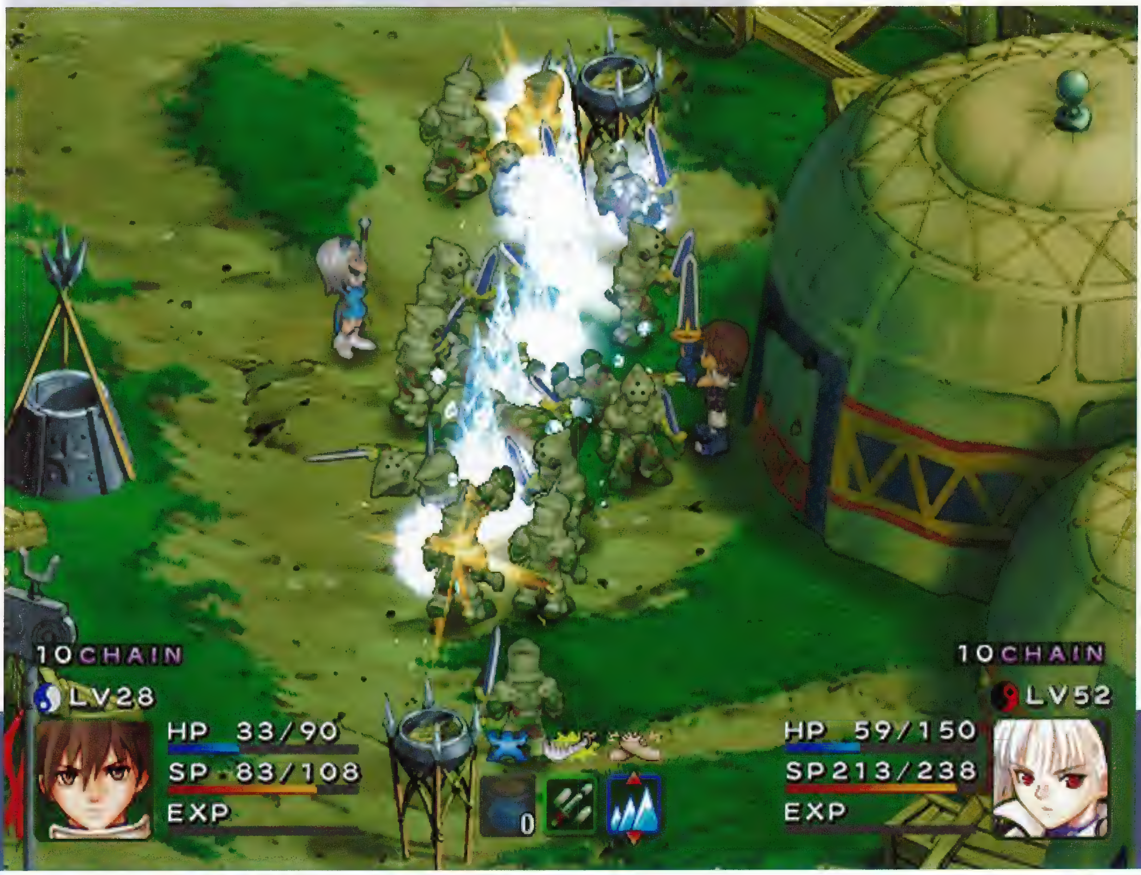
Shining Tears is developed by the same team that brought us Crusader of Centy for Genesis. That's a very good thing!

System: PlayStation 2

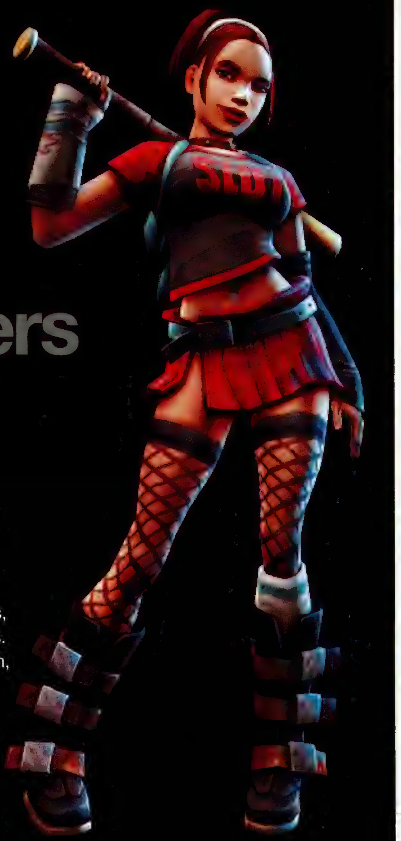
Developer: Nextech

Publisher: Sega

Available: March



Say what you will about SD characters, but you gotta love this detail.



TimeSplitters
Future Perfect

The capable series finally gets some substantial meat on its sturdy bones

Oh, how times are changing. Back when TimeSplitters was released on the young PlayStation 2, its extremely straightforward action relied on little more than solo run-and-gun shootouts, simple level design and clean, basic visuals. The sequel wasn't much different. Good fun, but the bar has been rocketed up since.

What to do with TimeSplitters: Future Perfect? Anyone who's followed the series this far will attest that Free Radical's sense for making the simplistic snap is their biggest strength, especially appealing in the multiplayer arena. With this latest installment, things seem juiced up quite a bit, especially in the visuals department. As an enormous fan of their fantastic amnesiac adventure Second Sight, I've always loved these guys' ability to draw colorful worlds and characters with incredibly distinct, basic design strokes. Same applies here.

The time-travel theme still applies; in theory, this allows for some pretty diverse setups, but the proof will be in the final design. More focus is being placed on narrative, more dynamic settings and presentation, and other areas of additional resonance, like the presence of helpers popping up and vehicles for diversity. Online will play a big part as well: 16 people can get involved in the action across the typical areas of Deathmatch, Capture the Flag, etc. Like before, you can fashion your own arenas, and the diversity of characters you can throw in is in upwards of 150 colorfully drawn creations. The competition is most definitely fierce, but I, for one, can't wait to see what Free Radical finally brings to the table. Brady Fiechter

> "With this latest installment, things seem juiced up quite a bit..."

PAST CORTEZ

TimeSplitters: Future Perfect

Point of Interest

Future Perfect is the third game in the TimeSplitters series; the first two installments were published by Eidos.

System: PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube
Developer: Free Radical
Publisher: EA
Online: 16p multiplayer (PS2, Xbox)
Available: 2005

Free Radical's unique design sensibilities shine through in the multitude of characters.

"The alert level has been raised to RED!"

"Scored 9.0, 9.5 And 10 Out Of 10. Awarded Editor's Choice: Gold"
-Electronic Gaming Monthly

"MGS3 Looks Astounding, From Its Inspiration To Its Story To Its Gameplay."
-GameSpy.com

"5 Out Of 5"
-Official PlayStation Magazine

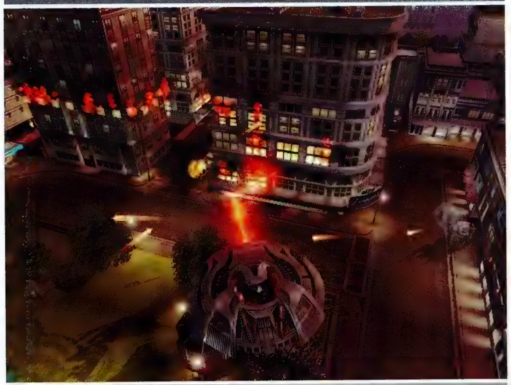
"10 Out Of 10"
-PlayStation Magazine

"The Finest Installment In Konami's Acclaimed Stealth-Espionage Series."
-Electronic Gaming Monthly

TACTICAL ESPIONAGE ACTION
METAL GEAR SOLID 3
SNAKE EATER
WWW.METALGEARSOLID.COM
MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Language
Sexual Themes
PlayStation 2
ONLY ON PLAYSTATION 2
KONAMI

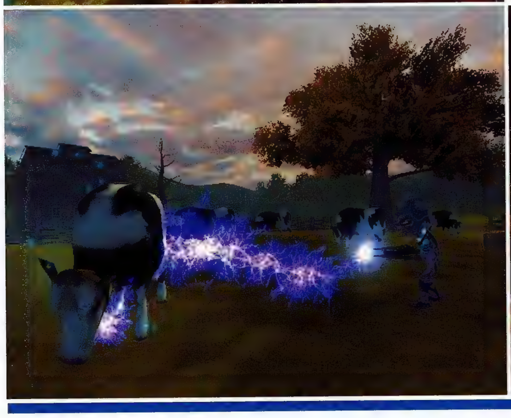
TAL GEAR®, METAL GEAR SOLID® and SNAKE EATER™ are either registered trademarks or trademarks of KONAMI COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT JAPAN, INC. ©1987 2004 KONAMI COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT JAPAN. KONAMI® is a registered trademark of KONAMI CORPORATION. All rights erved. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. The ratings icon is a trademark of the Entertainment Software Association.

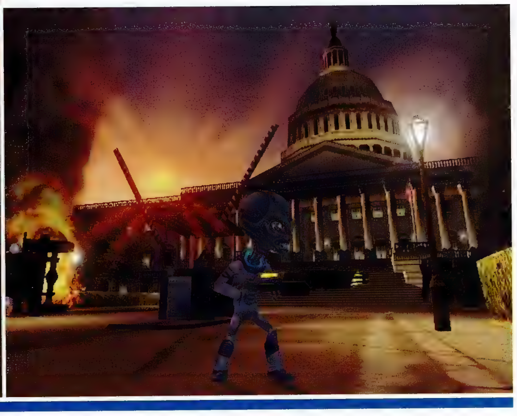
Destroy All Humans



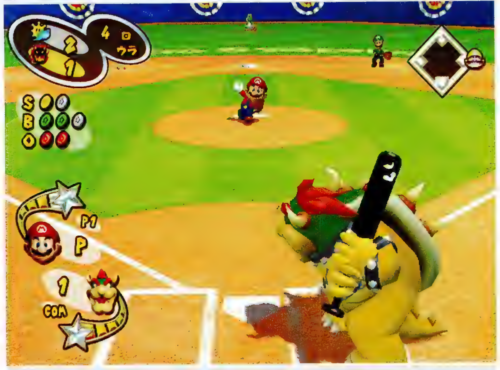
Amidst all of this holiday commotion, let us not forget that Crypto the alien will soon be landing console-wide (well, almost—the GC will sit this one out), ready to pilfer our sordid little minds and make way for the Furon invasion force. His mission is to infiltrate, control, harvest and then nuke brain stems worldwide, and believe us when we say he's got the tools (lovely utensils like the Zap-O-Matic and Quantum Deconstructor get the job done) and the talent; the little freak can fly, hypnotize, body snatch, read minds and more! We're all gonna die! Abduct this nasty bit of gaming the second it shows up in February 2005. **Dave Halverson**

System: PlayStation 2, Xbox
Developer: Pandemic
Publisher: THQ
Available: February





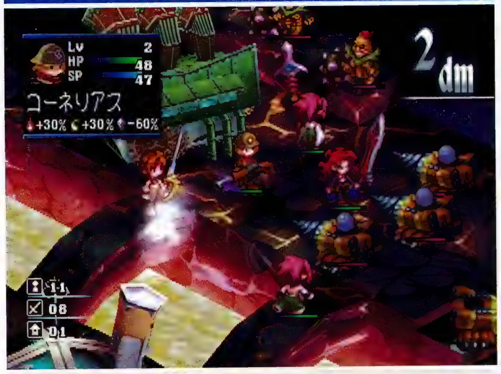
Mario Baseball



We've taken it to the court in Mario Tennis, hit the links in Mario Golf, and now we're heading out to the diamond in Mario Baseball. Nintendo hasn't said much about this title yet—it has yet to be officially announced for the North American market—but as the name indicates, Mario and his associates, including Luigi, Yoshi, Bowser, Waluigi, Wario and Donkey Kong, will be applying their brand of fun to one of the world's most beloved sports. Expect crazy power-ups, themed stadiums and the general Mario wackiness. **Chris Hoffman**

System: GameCube
Developer: Nintendo
Publisher: Nintendo
Available: TBA

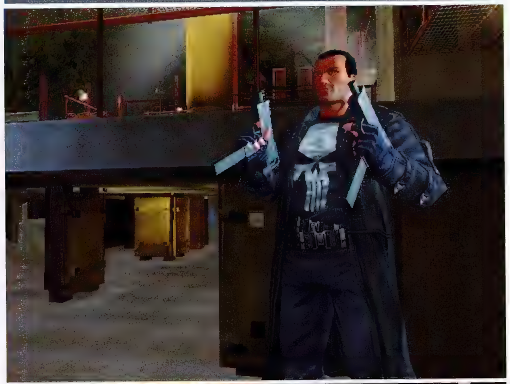
Phantom Kingdom



In the vein of Disgaea and its ilk comes Phantom Kingdom, the latest ridiculously cute but incredibly deep strategy-RPG from Nippon Ichi Software. In Phantom Kingdom, the demon ruler, Lord Zetta, destroyed the world when he burnt the book of truth; now he must recreate it, one chapter at a time, using tanks, mechs and various character classes (including Sword Masters, Magicians and…Evil Carrots?) to do his bidding. Aside from just fighting, players will have to sacrifice characters to create useful facilities (like hospitals) in battle. Both a regular and limited edition release of Phantom Kingdom are planned. **Chris Hoffman**

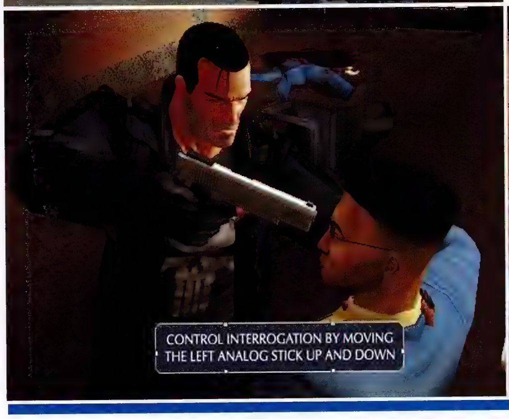
System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Nippon Ichi Software
Publisher: NIS America
Available: 2005

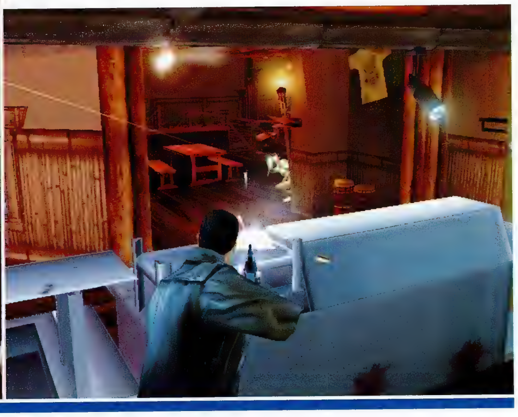
The Punisher



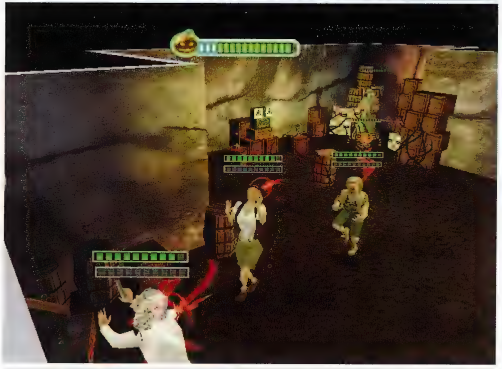
Just in time to save the day after a pedestrian film debut, the true Punisher is eager to return and set things straight. Volition is taking one of the darkest comics in the Marvel arsenal and adding extra coats of black, creating a game in which Frank Castle not only kills his prey—amidst some of the most interactive environments ever—but can interrogate and send them into the hereafter using their own brutal tactics. You've never seen action quite like this before. It's true the Punisher has had a tumultuous past (crap Genesis game, forgettable film debut), but the buck, along with the lives of countless goons, stops here. **Dave Halverson**

System: PlayStation 2, Xbox, PC
Developer: Volition
Publisher: THQ
Available: January


CONTROL INTERROGATION BY MOVING THE LEFT ANALOG STICK UP AND DOWN



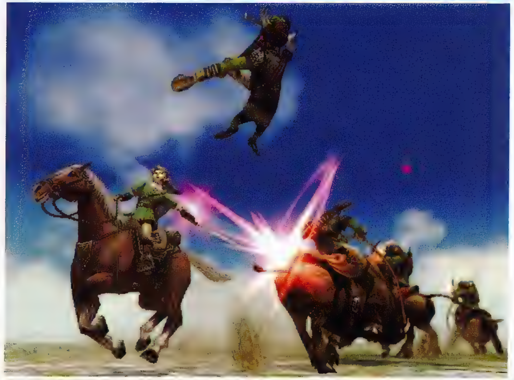
Gravenville: The Ghost Master Chronicles



Empire's cool PC RTS-puzzle-adventure, in which you're sent to the town of Gravenville (hey, just like the name!) to check out a rise in paranormal activity, is headed for console with the added ability to scare rather than always be scared. Using your own personal gaggle of ghosts to comb the game's 12 cranny-filled environments, the emphasis is placed on pants-wetting terror as you combat all manner of ghouls and spiritual freaks, conquering fears, manipulating pitiful humans to solve puzzles and free other fleshies, and bring a little life to the afterlife. **Dave Halverson**

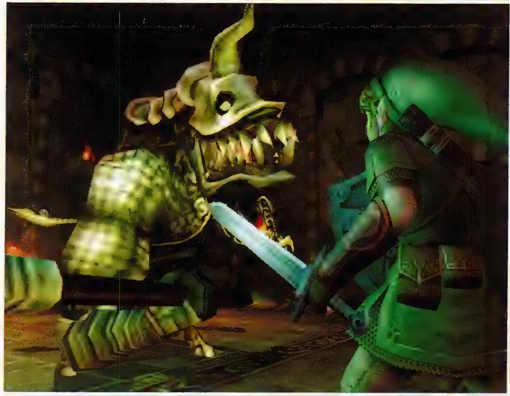
System: PlayStation 2, Xbox
Developer: Spiral House/Sick Puppies
Publisher: Empire Interactive
Available: Q1 2005

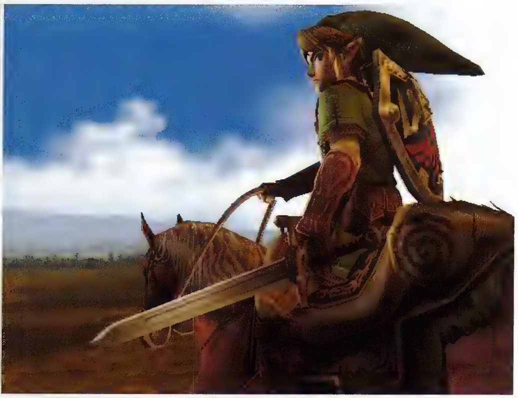
The Legend of Zelda



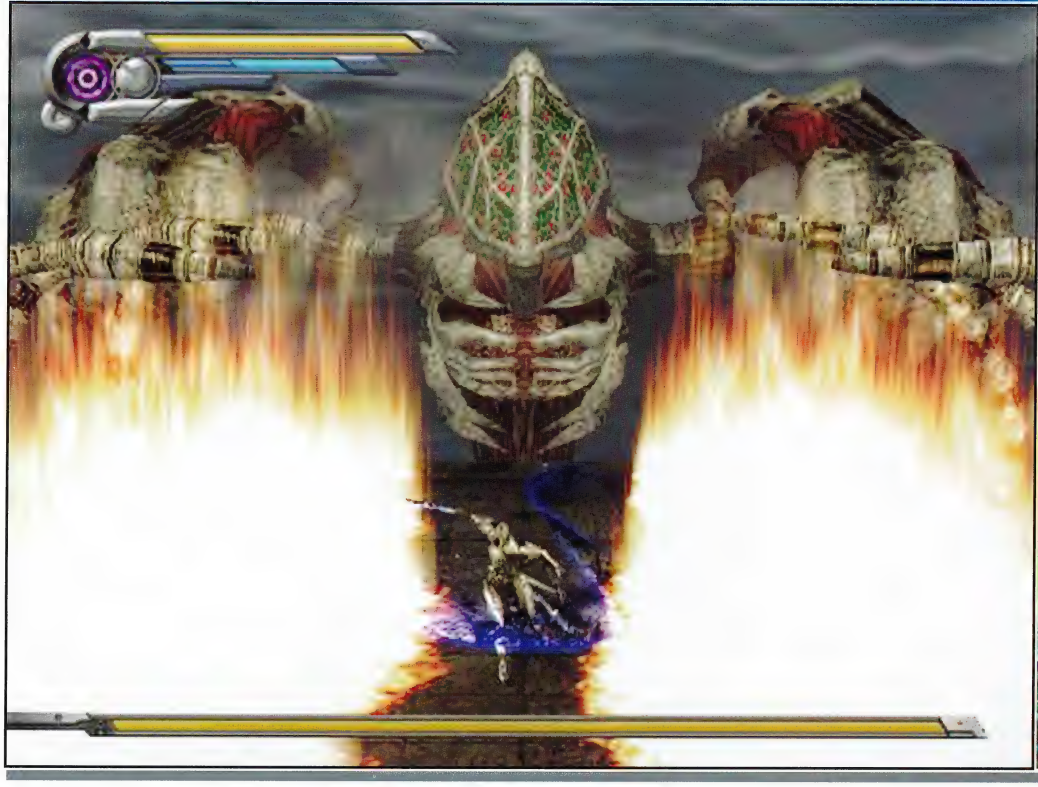
The new Legend of Zelda game—seeing its debut at E3 was one of 2004's most memorable gaming moments, and it remains, without a doubt, one of the most anticipated games for 2005. If you somehow missed the fervor, the new (and still untitled) Zelda boasts a more mature, realistic-looking Link, sporting some of the most impressive visuals we've yet seen, and his new abilities include swordplay while on horseback. Puzzles, combat and a magical world await in the latest installment of one of gaming's greatest series. Let's just hope the ancillary models turn out half as good as Link. **Chris Hoffman**

System: GameCube
Developer: Nintendo
Publisher: Nintendo
Available: 2005



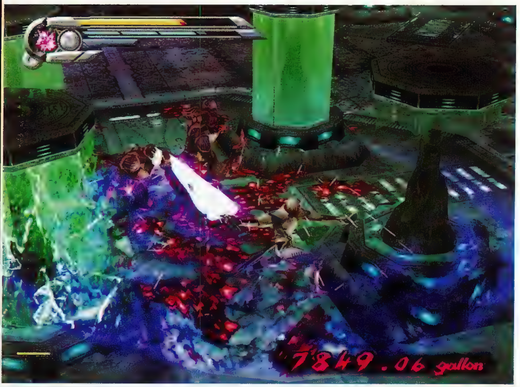


Nano Breaker

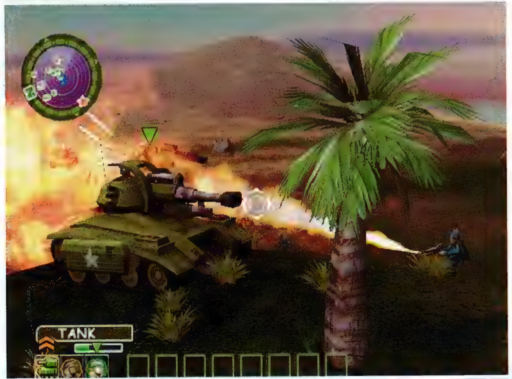


If anyone can bring the gaming faithful back to the hack 'n' slash table, it's Koji Igarashi. Whether this is his answer to Devil May Cry or a between-Castlevanias snack, for as visceral as Nano Breaker is (we received a playable just in time to put in a couple hours), unless it evolves substantially beyond its unique combo-building hook, I'm afraid it's going to fall on deaf ears. The protagonist, Jake, awakened after a seven-year cold sleep, and his plasma blade are cool customers, and the Blue Stinger-like island setting where nanotech has gone awry make for a mood-inducing assault, but we'll see where it goes from here. **Dave Halverson**

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: KCE Tokyo
Publisher: Konami
Available: February

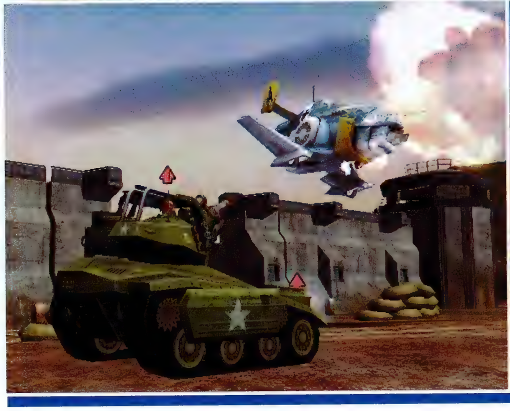


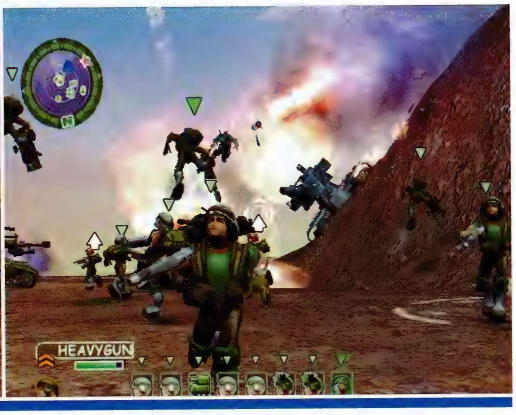
Advance Wars



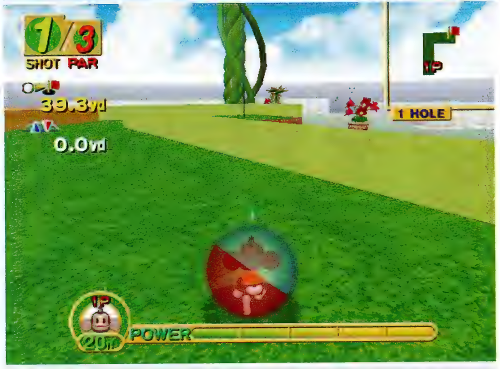
This update to the hit GBA titles shakes things up by turn-based sim-action into real-time action-strategy. In gameplay sorties similar to Microsoft's Kingdom Under Fire, you give commands on the battlefield (leading flamethrower units, heavy gunners, infantry and other specialized soldiers) and then charge into battle along with your troops in real time, the difference here being the ability to branch into different divisions yourself and eventually command armored tanks, gunships and other weapons of mass destruction. As the war rages on, so do your battalions and the many tools of war at your disposal. **Dave Halverson**

System: GameCube
Developer: Kuju Ent.
Publisher: Nintendo
Available: Q1 2005





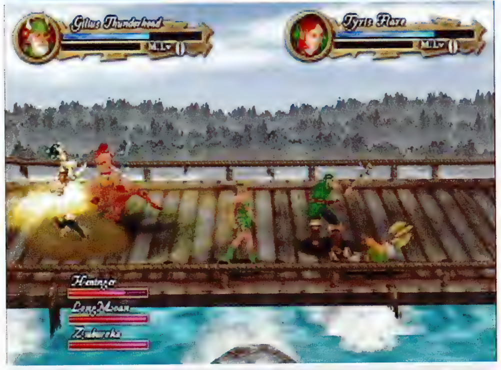
Super Monkey Ball Deluxe



Super Monkey Ball Deluxe gives PS2 and Xbox owners a chance to experience Sega's intense game of finesse and precision control wrapped in an ultra-cute veneer. The game offers 300 simian-abusing courses to tackle, integrating the challenging stages of both Super Monkey Ball 1 and 2 with 46 new courses, which can be played either in Story Mode or Challenge Mode, where up to four players can compete for the best time. The 12 highly entertaining party games (such as Monkey Bowling and Monkey Fight) from SMB1 & 2 are also included here. **Chris Hoffman**

System: PlayStation 2, Xbox
Developer: Sega (Amusement Vision)
Publisher: Sega
Available: March

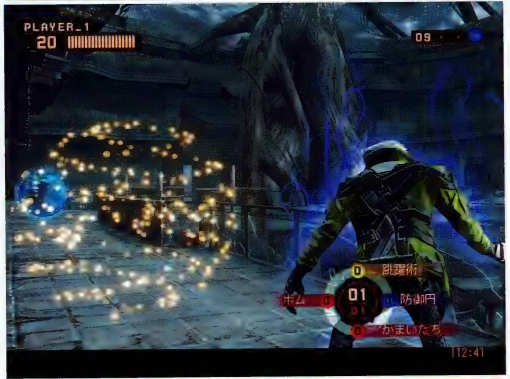
Sega Classics



Love them as we do, no one can screw up a compilation like Sega. In this latest snafu, rather than loading up a disc with the original arcade Golden Axe, Monaco GP, Outrunners, Galaxy Force, Moonwalker and maybe Daytona 2, they decide to unload the 3D nightmare that is Sega Ages in Japan: cheap 3D renditions of great games made on tiny budgets. Here we get Golden Axe in chunky 3D, a tragic overhead Monaco debacle, Virtua Racing (the disc's saving grace), the painful Ages Outrun, the ultra-sad log that is Ages Space Harrier and what appears to be Fantasy Zone. Sega remakes maybe, but classics, never. **Dave Halverson**

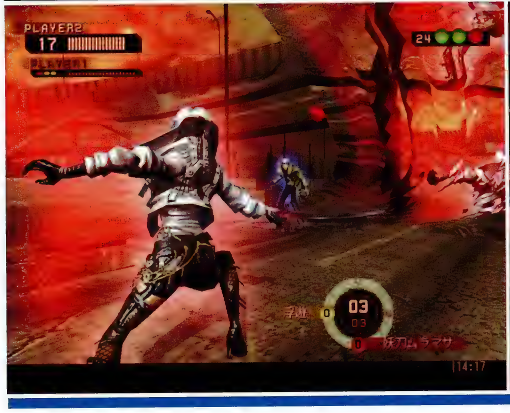
System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Sega/3D Ages
Publisher: Sega
Available: February

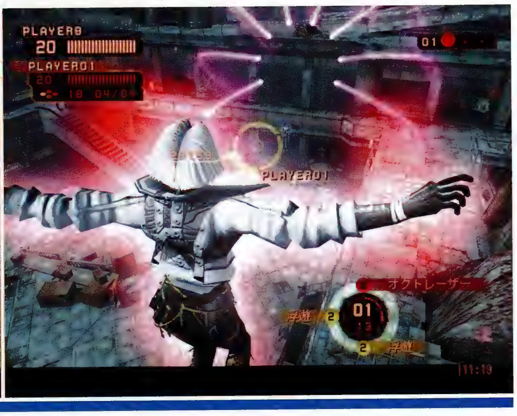
Phantom Dust



Emerging from the safety of the underground to face the ravaged surface of a decimated Earth, in Phantom Dust (named for the particles that fill the air), the action is twofold: Combing the post-apocalyptic wasteland through some 200 single-player missions using your psychic skills to defeat the nightmarish creatures that stalk the Earth, you can go it alone, or migrate onto Live, where you can create clans, compete in tournaments, trade, sell or ante skills, download new maps, etc. Either way, the real allure here is that the Phantom Dust team is led by Yukio Futatsugi, the original creator of Panzer Dragoon and Panzer Dragoon Orta. **DH**

System: Xbox
Developer: Microsoft Game Studios Japan
Publisher: Majesco
Available: March





Ford Racing 3

Ford Racing 3 is based on driving every Ford motorcar since your granddaddy's granddaddy was a sparkle in his granddaddy's eye. In fact, this is developer Razorworks' main gig, as well as the crowning jewel in the Empire arsenal, for obvious reasons. If you like Fords, this is your life. I suppose it also bears mentioning that the game controls like the real thing, contains 55 genuine vehicles from classic to concept, has 26 tracks with different surfaces and weather, offers 11 different types of races and, of course, is built Ford tough…so go looking for realistic damage. It also runs at 60 fps on PS2. **Dave Halverson**

System: PlayStation 2, Xbox, PC
Developer: Razorworks
Publisher: Empire Interactive
Available: November

Doom 3

Looking as good as can be expected (which is mind-boggling still), the scariest, most ambient—not to mention painstakingly detailed—FPS on the planet is soon to make its way onto Xbox where millions of naïve parents can gasp in horror as they clean up the puddles of whiz in front of the family TV. Hmmm, what can I say about Doom 3 that you don't already know? This here's an FPS—highly visceral, intense as all hell and, bar none, the most claustrophobic, look-over-your-shoulder shooter of all time. Anyone who says it's anything less than great because it's more of the same is a moron. **Dave Halverson**

System: Xbox
Developer: Vicarious Visions
Publisher: Activision
Available: March

Tekken 5

Now that we've finally had some hands-on time with Tekken 5, we can confirm that yes, indeed, one of the top names in 3D fighting is continuing to do what it does best: kick a lot of ass. Twenty characters are available from the get-go—including returning favorites like Paul, Jin and Nina, plus three new characters—and in addition to the traditional fighting, the home version will boast a bonus action-adventure mode, as well as new CG sequences. And you know how Heihachi's kinda dead? Yeah, he's *really* pissed off about that. **Chris Hoffman**

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Namco
Publisher: Namco
Available: February

JACK-5
XIAOYU

KAZUYA
PAUL

ODDWORLD

STRANGER'S WRATH

Howdy stranger

INTERVIEW

Lorne Lanning
president and creative director
Oddworld Inhabitants

> "If you didn't see the genius of Oddworld before, it's about to roll up and park on your front lawn..."

Have you ever had a game where you put it in and loved it so much from the outset you actually had to call someone? Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath is one of those. I'd always imagined what the mad scientists at Oddworld Inhabitants might do with (or perhaps "to" is a better word) traditional action adventure, but I never saw the hooks in Stranger's Wrath coming. Wrangling bounties via a *Ghostbusters*-like contraption amidst a dusty, living, neo-Western landscape in which you switch between perfectly honed action and FPS is one thing, but shooting and collecting your own "live" ammo is quite another. The first time I saw a Fuzzle sitting up on my crossbow, I started giggling maniacally…someone should really breed these. Then it dawned on me that Microsoft had actually dropped Stranger, which pretty much just freaked me out. I mean, who drops a triple-A genre redefining masterpiece ripe for film, merchandising and whatever else the media gods deem profitable? Have they gone completely mad? Tork, Vince, and Psychonauts I can fathom (not understand, but fathom), but dropping Stranger points to some serious internal ineptitude.

Thankfully the game has found a home with deep enough pockets to run with it. Had this one ended up with a small publisher, it would have been the crime of the century, because beyond the genius gameplay, the dialogue (which again uses their GameSpeak technology) and bit players have to be seen and heard to be believed. This is the whole package. If you didn't see the genius of Oddworld before, it's about to roll up and park on your front lawn; this is gaming's Pixar. How Abe never saw a film treatment (or has he…?) I do not know, but with Stranger they've hit pay dirt. Either that or I'm just overly starved for original content… Dave Halverson

Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath

Point of Interest
Microsoft Game Studios actually gave this game up, like a big fat Christmas gift basket for EA... What's that about?

System: PlayStation 2, Xbox
Developer: Oddworld Inhabitants
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Available: January

play: As much as I loved Munch's Odyssey (and I loved it long time), I've always hoped Oddworld would turn its attention to action/adventure, having perfected cause and effect. What finally sparked the change?
Lorne Lanning: We've tried a few play styles in the past, and this round we wanted something more intense and deeper. We wanted to focus on a more action-based character and play style while adding an entertaining twist to the shooting genre.

You couldn't have picked a better theme or designed a better universe. How'd you arrive at a critter populated neo-Western?
We felt that a Western-inspired theme was a natural setting for us to expand Oddworld toward more intense action. The idea of dusty towns, outlaws, ignorant settlers, displaced peoples, greedy industry barons, genocide…these go quite naturally with the brand we've established and it was a solid theme to play off of for introducing a bounty hunting hero. We also loved the gunfights of the Sergio Leone movies, and we wanted that extended sense of shootout, not just shoot and cancel, to create more prolonged conflicts with more persistent enemies.

> "With live ammo, I knew that the idea was a potential winner."
>
> Lorne Lanning, president and creative director, Oddworld Inhabitants

How much planning goes into a universe of this size and scope?
Too much, I think, and we need more sleep! If you look at the book that Ballistic Publishing has just released through their website, "The Art of Oddworld Inhabitants: The First Ten Years," you'll find that it goes into a tremendous amount of detail and insight into how we think about our designs and where the inspiration comes from. This book means a lot to us because it reveals the degree of depth that we've gone through to come up with these concepts and designs.

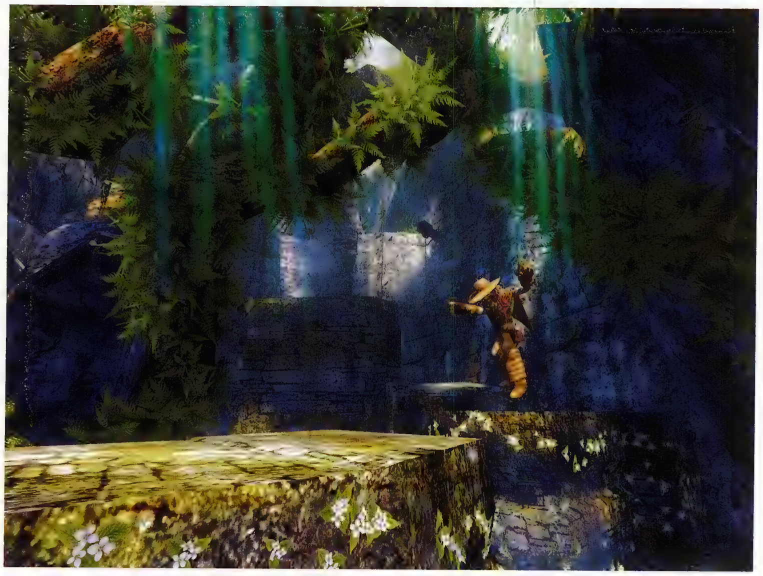
Within the first few minutes of the game, you rewrite the rules (as only you can) by letting us trap our own "live" ammo. What a stroke of genius this is, using critters for various deeds... Who came up with this one?
We try to harness the creativity of the team by brainstorming and tossing challenging concepts at them. With live ammo, I knew that the idea was a potential winner. I had a few specific ideas of what types of critters could do what, and the basic concept of how you would acquire them, but it needed a lot of discussion and creativity brought to it to make it something fully viable for an extended period of time. An idea is just a spark that needs a team behind it to fuel it into a fire. If it doesn't get that fuel…it's likely to fizzle.

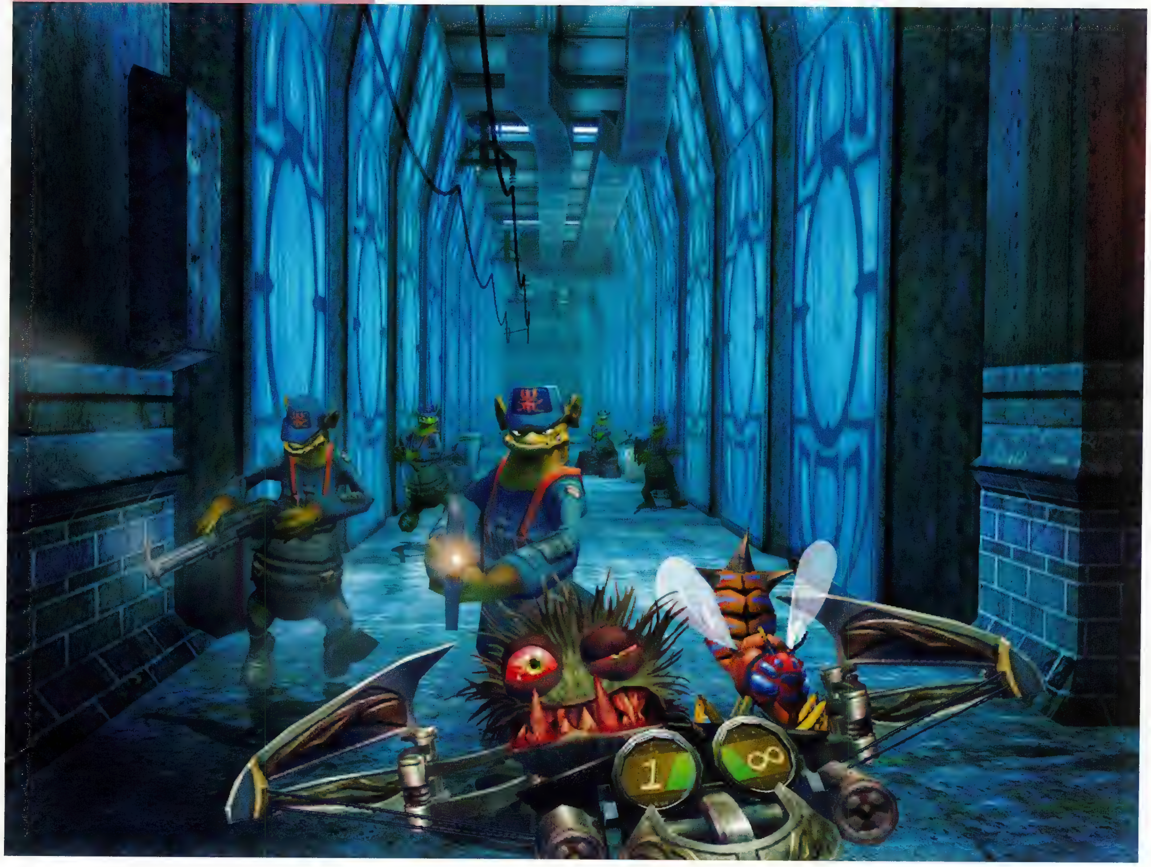
You've also, once again, raised the bar on voice acting, depth of character, character design and ambience. Is this the one that will finally see big-time merchandising and perhaps a film treatment?
Really happy to hear that you like the voices. A few more people on the team really stepped up to the plate and brought a lot to the voice mix this round. We had fun doing it, and I think that will come across when people play it. Per merchandising and film treatments… All of that would be great and we'd love to see it happen if it can be done with quality, but you know what they say about counting chickens. I will say that there is a finished Abe screenplay.

Ah-ha! Looking at the success of *The Incredibles*, a PG-rated CG film on either would certainly seem timely, and EA certainly has the muscle… Would it be in conjunction with a Pixar, Blue Sky, etc., or are you equipped to take on such a project in-house?
We've been in discussions with Hollywood studios and there has been a lot of interest and excitement. There are several ways it could be done, and we're still exploring various options. The most desirable to us, of course, is to build the digital film CG studio that we've always wanted. We could have optioned Abe long ago, but that would have lessened our role in the process to bring it to the screen and we believe that our vision of the film would be something unique and special and something that would be very difficult for someone else to deliver. So we're being patient on this front and holding onto the dream rather than putting up our characters for adoption.

Have you retained some level of creative control on such endeavors?
We've worked long and hard to retain control of our property, but once someone actually forks over the cash to make a major motion picture happen, well, that's an agreement that has yet to be inked. When you get into movie budgets and dealing with Hollywood, creative control can exist to a certain degree. The more you can convince them that what you are creating is viable, the more creative control you may have, but no directors get absolute control over movie productions (including great directors like Martin Scorsese and [Francis Ford] Coppola), unless it's completely low budget or they're paying for it themselves (like George Lucas has been doing).

Good luck buttoning up the game. We're sure it's going to be a huge success.
Ahhhh, may your words prove prophetic. We hope you're right and, as always, we thank you for the support. **play**





Those are live rounds. No really, they're alive. How awesome is that Fuzzle, by the way?

Red Ninja

She'll leave you running red

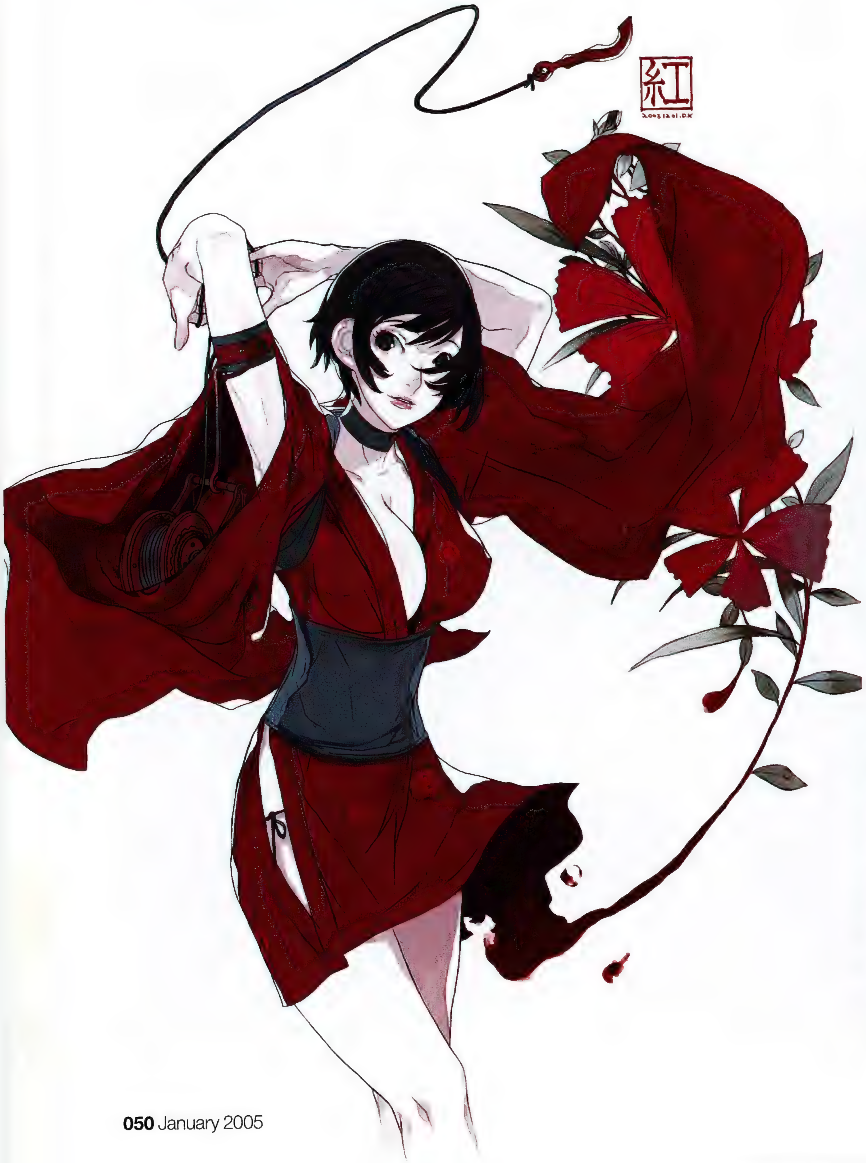
There haven't been any copycats in the female ninja stealth category, probably because up until now the only place to get it was in the better half of Tenchu. How ironic that just as K2 decided to finally kick Rikimaru to the curb and let the ladies take over, upstart Japanese developer Tranji decided to lay claim to the crown with their own stealthy vixen, Kurenai, in Red Ninja. Like all tortured souls, Kurenai is motivated by the kind of seething hatred that stems from being hung by the neck and left for dead after witnessing her beloved father's brutal murder. She's one pissed off, scantily clad killing machine. If the first rule of Western game-making is "know thy market," Tranji deserves props for a first effort so uninhibited. Kurenai is blatantly sexual. You can't help but look at her ass half the game because it's often completely exposed. She's also amply breasted and, best of all, not afraid to use her sex appeal as bait via a seduction move that has her playfully teasing weak-minded enemies into her midst and then in a flash straddling them and thrusting her blade into their neck. Quentin Tarantino would be proud.

While the setting (1500s Japan) and basic stealth mechanic of sneaking up behind enemies and turning on the blood hose is akin to Tenchu, that is where the gameplay similarities thankfully (Tenchu has that pretty well covered) end. Red Ninja is more of a stealth/action/adventure hybrid than a tried-and-true stealth game, incorporating elements of Ninja Gaiden, Tomb Raider and even Mortal Kombat for a more diverse overall killing spree. While stealth is almost always the best course of action, Kurenai is also built for combat. She's skilled in the Tetsugen wire technique, in which the hook is exactly that: a series of hooks she affixes to a wire used to grapple Bionic Commando/Metroid Prime-style and harpoon enemies, slicing them clean in half when properly recoiled. In most stealth games, being discovered is cause for panic, but in Red Ninja it merely signals that things are about to get good and bloody. Kurenai also possesses lightning speed, allowing her to wall-run, air-walk, streak invisibly and even run on water. She's so fast, in fact, that Tranji had to assign an inhibitor button to sustain her dash at normal speeds.

> "Tranji deserves props for a first effort so uninhibited. Kurenai is blatantly sexual."

Like Tenchu, additional weapons such as blowguns, smoke bombs and rocket explosives are also on hand, but for the most part, Red Ninja's as much about action and adventure as it is about stealth.

Aesthetically the game is quite pleasing—although I am hoping the Kurenai model looks better on Xbox—and in the area of synching character with environment, Tranji deserves major accolades for blessing their heroine with legs and feet that conform to the geometry in the game—an aspect of 3D game design that absolutely must become standard. Anything less sucks immeasurably as technology forges ahead. Red Ninja has all of the trappings of a killer new franchise, so we shot a few questions Tranji's way for further insight into the game's impending debut... Dave Halverson

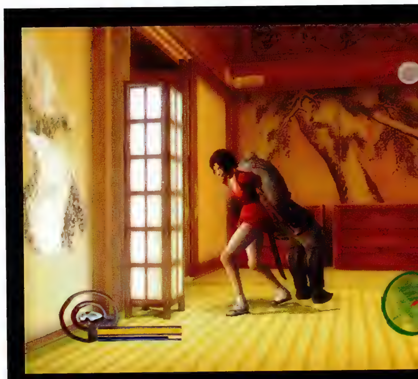


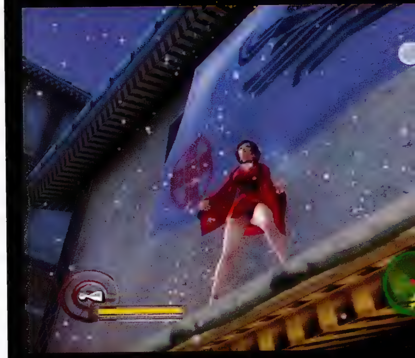
Red Ninja

Point of Interest

Red Ninja appeared to have met its end not so long ago when it temporarily dropped off the VU radar. It's nice to have Kurenai back.

System: PlayStation 2, Xbox
Developer: Tranji Studio
Publisher: VU Games
Available: March





A killer view of a view to a kill. God, I'm clever.

Interview

Tranji Studio, developers of Red Ninja

play: Please tell us about Tranji...who you are and how you came together...

Taka Suzuki, CEO: There is a tendency in the recent game industry to have more resources available to certain companies and certain big projects. Now that we entered the PS2 and Xbox era, this tendency became stronger and the situation where smaller studios must make titles that are able to compete with these titles.

Unfortunately, it is hard for smaller studios to compete with these big projects with the amount of resources. That is why we came together under the concept of "creating an innovative game that only smaller studios can do and supply them to the users."

But there are always risks in taking an innovative challenge. For that reason, we established a more compact team of highly skilled professionals to pump out smaller excitement and great ideas so that we can challenge tasks with higher risks faster and more precisely into a game. For these reasons, we aimed for a more compact and agile development style.

Obviously, a game cannot be considered sufficient with only an innovative technology. Just like how actors are oftentimes on the spotlight of movies, we acknowledge that an intriguing character is an important element in the game.

In recent times, there are many major companies that have released continuation titles. This also means that there have not

> "The game should leave you with a precious reward in your heart..."
>
> Taka Suzuki, CEO, Tranji Studio

been any new intriguing characters. During this kind of situation, we collaborated with the staff from the movie industry to create a new female heroine, Kurenai, and portray her in the game like they would an actress. We hope to make creating new intriguing characters one of our strongholds and continue entertaining our users.

The word "Tranji" comes from the Japanese word "To Ra," meaning tiger, the strongest animal in Asia. This also has the meaning that, although we are a small studio, our goal is to have a raison d'etre and survive in the period of transition where the game industry will become even more interesting.

And Red Ninja is your first title? Is this to be a mainstay in the studio's arsenal?
Kenichiro Takaki, game designer: Red Ninja would be our first title from Tranji Studio. We don't care if it may be the characters, the Tetsugen, the story, the graphics, or even Kurenai's panties that intrigues you, but please try indulging yourself inside the world of this game. Red Ninja became a magnificent game as one of our masterpieces from Tranji Studio.

Regarding Shinuke Sato: Did he approach you with the idea for Red Ninja or did you approach him with the idea for the game?
Takaki: Our encounter with director Sato was like fate. The character Yuki in *Princess Blade*, one of the movies he has directed, was very similar to Kurenai's concept and he became interested almost immediately. As a result, we were able to blend great gameplay with a deep, intriguing story, and we are very satisfied with our results. Please enjoy the many layers of the characters' emotions intertwining with each other in the story.

Red Ninja almost seems like a sexier Tenchu complemented by elements of Tomb Raider. Is it fair to say that your goal with Red Ninja is the ultimate blending of stealth and adventure?
Takaki: We created this game with the staff in America and Japan to create the ultimate action-adventure game set in Japan with the sexiest and the most extreme heroine in the world. I'm sure Red Ninja will become one of the leading titles in these genres.

I love the Tetsugen wire-work. Is this based on an actual skill?
Takaki: The Tetsugen is a combination of several existing weapons put together. Kurenai trained with Chiyome with the weapon that she was almost put to death with and polished it to Kurenai's original Tetsugen weapon. She probably didn't want to forget the emotions behind her father being killed.

The Tetsugen is created in the game with freedom in gameplay that no other person has seen the likes of before. The thing we want players to enjoy the most about the Tetsugen is the feeling. Throwing the Tetsugen, cutting with the Tetsugen and other actions occur right after the player presses the button, and the player is able to get an immediate response. With the new weapon Tetsugen, the player's control is portrayed directly into the game and I bet players will be hooked on critically killing enemies and slicing their heads off.

Walking (running) on water is impressive as well. You've really incorporated a lot of play mechanics into Red Ninja, as well as different ways to play each level. Is the player any more or less rewarded depending on how he or she plays the game?
Takaki: You're completely correct. There is no set way to play Red Ninja. You can choose to play completely stealthy, running into enemies and go on rampage with the Tetsugen, use the surroundings to fight the enemy, proceed on top of the water, run on the walls, make huge jumps with the hook swings, or you can play any way you want to. You may be able to reach places that you may have not expected by doing so. We really put many devices in various places, so try searching various places on the field. The game should leave you with a precious reward in your heart when you finish the game.

Another impressive part of the game is the way you have made Kurenai gel with the environments by letting her legs and feet conform to slopes and grades in the game. Is this difficult to implement? It certainly adds greatly to the feel of the game.
Takaki: Thank you very much. It's actually not too hard to implement, but it was hard to adjust the system to match the geometry in the game. We planned to make the geometry in the game not just a simple, flat ground, but have many undulations, so there were several incidences that her legs bent in inhuman ways. But going through all those troubles would surely make Kurenai stand out in the game and increase the player's enthusiasm in playing the game.

If you get tired from all the battles, try putting Kurenai's leg up on a rock or something on the ground. But be careful to check if there is anyone around before you do so. You just might get stealth killed from behind by your mom or your lover if they catch you.

And then—of course—there's the seduction move. What a great way to do away with weak-minded guards! Was this move planned from the outset or did it evolve with the development?
Takaki: The seduction move was present from the time of the project proposal. What else comes to mind besides seductiveness when you think of a female ninja? We were scolded many times by VU Games in the development stages because it was too extreme, but we were able to finalize the seduction poses to very good ones... If there is a sequel to this, we would like to put in seductions where she takes off her robe. Don't forget to look not only at Kurenai's seductions but Akemi's unconsciously executed seductions too!

We were given access to the PS2 build for our preview. Does the Xbox game include any enhancements?
Takaki: The basics are the same, although we enhanced the graphics and changed some of the voices to handle the 3D voicing to utilize the Xbox's machine power.

The music in the game is quite special: reminiscent of Zelda instrumentally but in a more traditional Japanese style. Is the audio being recorded in-house?
Masanori Adachi, composer: We tried to blend Japanese instruments and a Japanese melody into a Western orchestral arrangement. By using a traditional Japanese instrument called the shinobue (Shino whistle), we were able to portray a sense of mystery and sensuality. We also think it matched well with the female character. All the audio besides this shinobue was created via computer. We didn't use a real orchestra and instead we used orchestra simulation software called QLSO. It's hard to operate but it has a lot of possibility to expand.

What are you most proud of about Red Ninja? What are you hoping gamers find most appealing about your original game debut?
Takaki: Red Ninja was like a challenge to recent users that have been complaining that "recent games are flashy but it's not that great of a game when you play it and I've seen this game somewhere before." New characters, new world view, new story and new gameplay. Red Ninja is full of fresh, new surprises and excitement. Please try feeling the message we shouted out to our users. **play**

play magazine presents
girls of gaming
volume 2
play magazine presents
girls of gaming
A celebration of gaming's greatest females and the people who made them....
Dead Sexy
BloodRayne
With a movie and video game sequel in the works, gaming's hottest hybrid is hotter then hell

Super Combo Deal!

While supplies last get Girls of Gaming 1 & 2 delivered to your door for just $21.00! (price includes shipping and handling)

To order go to **playmagazine.com** and click **Get Play** or send check or money order to:

play magazine
29229 Canwood St. Suite 200
Agoura Hills, Ca 91301
c/o Girls of Gaming

Reviews

January 2005

Metroid Prime 2 Echoes 054
Mega Man X8 056
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas 057
Tork 058
Suikoden IV 059
Call of Duty: Finest Hour 060
Growlanser Generations 062
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater 064
The King of Fighters '02/'03 066
Review Gallery 067

Bio hazard

Dave Halverson
Editor in Chief

Dave critiques every game based on how well it hits its target audience, and has been practicing what he preaches in print for 13 years. He truly lives for his games. Within everything Dave writes, you will also find a little bit of his personal love of the art of gaming and game creation, the driving force in his life outside of music and actual human interaction.

Favorite genres: Platformers, adventure, motocross, action-RPGs, 2D
Now playing: Stranger's Wrath
Thought of the Month: I'm so digging Stranger's Wrath... go get Tork for $20!

Brady Fiechter
Executive Editor

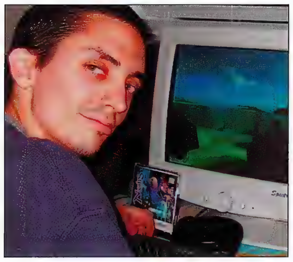
Brady feels that when you've been playing video games since video games were invented, you tend to start to look past the unnecessary need to boil a game down to its mechanical parts and start to see the artistry and spirit of imagination that goes into its creation. It's never as simple as polygons and cool explosions.

Favorite genres: Adventure, first-person shooters, action, RPGs
Now playing: RE4 over and over
Thought of the Month: So many great holiday games...where to begin!?

Chris Hoffman
Senior Editor

Chris has been playing games since the days of the 2600, back when graphics were blocks and plotlines were barely afterthoughts. Maybe that's why he considers gameplay first when reviewing most genres, and why he pays special attention to all things handheld. He also feels that a great story can be equally compelling, thus his love of RPGs.

Favorite genres: RPGs, action, adventure, fighting, wrestling
Now playing: Feel the Magic XX/XY
Thought of the Month: Time to go through MGS3 another time!



Mike Griffin
PC Editor

Even as a wee lad playing Zaxxon on Coleco, the technology and artistry of game design has always fascinated Mike. He thinks some games are timeless in that respect, whether 2D, 3D, flat-shaded or bump mapped. Mike's goal is to equip the readers with accurate information, so that limited funds and time can be put to good use.

Favorite genres: MMORPGs, first-person shooters, action-adventure
Now playing: World of Warcraft
Thought of the Month: It's not the number of polys; it's how you use them.

Ashley "Veela" Esqueda
Associate Editor

Ashley reviews games mostly based on how they make her feel; if they can elicit an emotional response out of her (happy, sad, angry or otherwise), then she know it's worth her time. She's been playing games since 1986, and will always pledge her allegiance to the glory days of 2D...long live the Castlevanias and Ghosts n' Goblins of the world.

Favorite genres: RPGs, adventure, platformers, beat-based games.
Now playing: KOTOR II
Thought of the Month: Why aren't we living *The Jetsons* yet???

Michael Hobbs
Art Director

A gamer since Space Invaders, Michael has a soft spot for 2D shooters and other games that directly engage the player. Nintendo certainly ranks high on his list of favorite developers, and though recent forays into the world of MMORPGs have rather consumed him, he'll always have time for a game of Bangaio.

Favorite genres: Action, racing, adventure, alternative, shooters
Now playing: Metal Gear Solid 3
Thought of the month: I can't win in DS multiplayer.

Game of the Month

Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater 064

The latest tactical espionage action masterpiece from Hideo Kojima has arrived, and the game truly lives up to the hype. MGS3 is a riveting experience from end to end.

>>

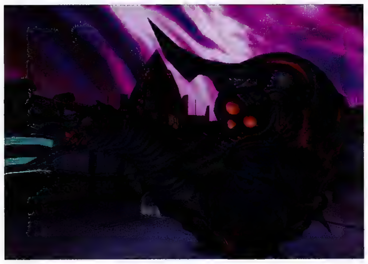
Rating System

Our scores represent both a game's technical merits and our personal opinions based on our expertise within each genre, of which the stars alone do not necessarily tell the whole story. It's always wise to refer to the text.

★★★★ Legendary
★★★⯪ Great
★★★☆ Good
★★⯪☆ Decent
★★☆☆ Average
★⯪☆☆ Poor
★☆☆☆ Bad
⯪☆☆☆ Disaster

Metroid Prime 2
ECHOES

An amazing sequel that lives up to the Metroid name



"Samus Aran returns in beautiful form, an intriguing presence in this lonely alien world."

No, Metroid Prime 2 Echoes isn't much different from Metroid Prime; the sensational newness is missing, the unexpected surprise has been replaced with a comfortable continuation of central ideas, its reach is safer and slighter. Fine. Pointing to all the areas Echoes flirts with deficiencies doesn't change the fact that this game is a magnificent adventure.

Like the first Prime, this latest in one of gaming's most respected series—I still cite Super Metroid as one of the greats—understands the hypnotic spirit of the aged 2D games. Its reverence to the classic coexists elegantly and powerfully next to the entirely original, phenomenally structured designs of a phenomenal creativity.

Samus Aran returns in beautiful form, an intriguing presence in this lonely alien world. She is the most appealing of female warriors, quiet and mysterious, strong and dominant without overtly standing tall as an overdrawn caricature. She moves with unusual freedom and complexity for a first-person hero, double jumping and swimming, grappling and morphing. Locking on to the enemy for a circle-strafe mode of attack may feel limiting and too protracted at first, but the end result is an incredibly tangible interaction that becomes especially engaging in bigger battles.

Bosses are big component, and they don't go down easily. There is a nice level of challenge here, but the game is never frustrating or cheap. The satisfaction you get dismantling their intricate shapes and patterns is immense, and merely admiring their fantastic design—all the world's inhabitants are wondrous creations—is part of the immersion.

No game this year casts its web with such distinct mood and sci-fi wonder. The interlocking tubes and intricate rooms are as visually captivating as they are remarkably structured, fixing multiple elements of attraction into the setting. Giant pieces are constantly being rearranged for awesome visual and mechanical effect, stretches of corridors opening up after new weapons and abilities steadily empower Samus. It is this compelling exploration and skilled reliance

92
20
20
49
50

"No game this year casts its web with such distinct mood and sci-fi wonder."

Cavernous environs await exploration in Samus' latest adventure.

on backtracking and problem solving that only further distinguishes Echoes as a special work. And you can thank the icy score—one of the most perceptively crafted, best-placed soundtracks in a game—for symbiotic strength.

The inclusion of a light and dark world is probably the biggest change you can point to that separates this Metroid from its predecessors. Scattered across the world are portals that suck Samus into alternate dimension, where really much doesn't change other than a hue of poisonous ether that damages you outside of safe zones. The game is no better or worse without having to go through the process of switching back and forth between the two planes, but the concept seems underdeveloped in the end. The same could be said about the multiplayer portion of the game, which doesn't belong and comes off as obligatory filler.

There are times when you lose yourself to the emotion of Metroid Prime 2 Echoes, experience subtle resonance in the midst of the visceral stretches. So much of the game exists on a higher, more thoughtful level than what we're normally consuming—a contender for the year's best. Brady Fiechter

Metroid Prime 2 Echoes

+ From the music to the boss battles to the level design, everything is of the highest order.

− Doesn't have the same "wow factor" as the original Prime.

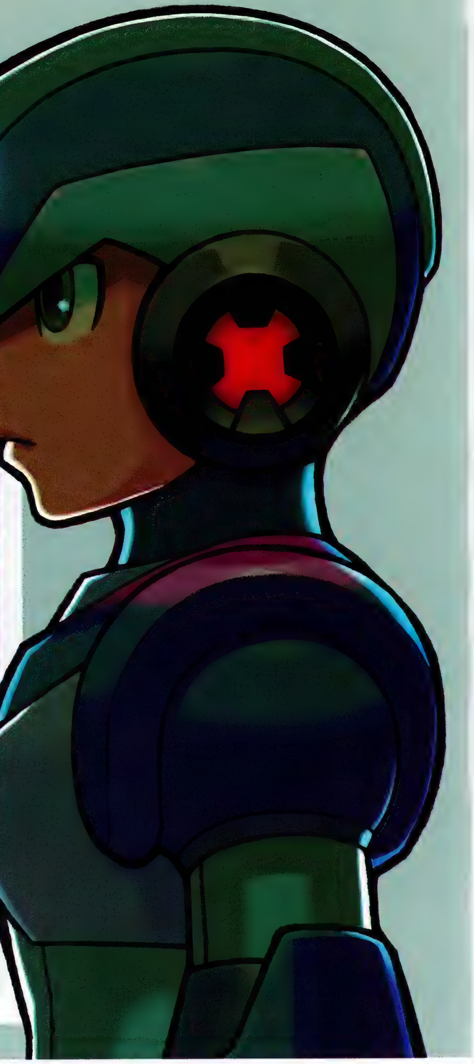
System: GameCube
Developer: Retro
Publisher: Nintendo
Online: None
Available: November

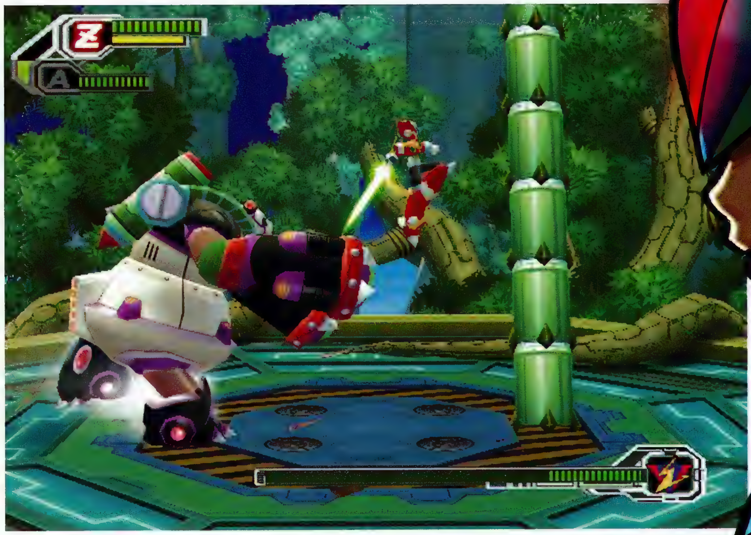
play Rating ★★★★

Agon Wastes

Mega Man X8

Finally, Mega Man is back in fine form





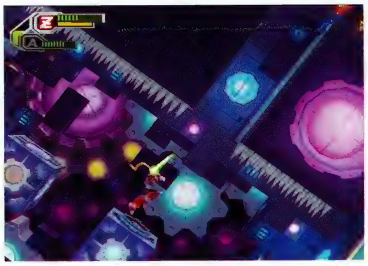
It is, once again, a good time to be a Mega Man fan. His anniversary compilation aside, things have been pretty rough for one of Capcom's biggest stars on console lately. Command Mission was underwhelming, Network Transmission's random weaponry just didn't work in an action game, X7 was a failed experiment in 3D, and I'm still trying to forget about X6. But redemption has arrived in the form of Mega Man X8—the best original console Mega Man game since the days of the Sega Saturn.

X8 takes the franchise back to basics as far as the core gameplay goes. No more auto-aiming, no more poorly designed 3D action stages, no more annoying Reploids to rescue. What we get instead are very nicely designed levels with a 2D feel and a modern look, complete with clever gameplay hooks (like reversible gravity), multiple routes, secrets, well-placed enemies and plenty of challenging obstacles. The gameplay is no longer hindered by being forced into a 3D mold, but the third dimension is used where appropriate to great effect. A few fully 3D vehicle stages are tossed in as well, which are a mixed bag—the "Central White" snowfield stage is pretty fun, while the "Dynasty" city level is not—but they would have served the game better if they were just shorter segments integrated within standard levels.

As in X7, players can swap characters on the fly, but the feature is made more enjoyable this time thanks to added character diversity, double-team super attacks and the ability to rescue partners from otherwise fatal traps. Another nifty new feature is the ability to steal enemy DNA, which opens the door to customizing characters with new enhancements as the player sees fit. Other changes for the better include a somewhat improved, less obtrusive story and various "Navigator" allies that offer hints through the stages—although you can opt out if you want to find every secret and boss weakness without assistance.

While the game remains challenging, one thing that might surprise long-time Mega Man fans is that X8 is a little shorter than the Mega Man norm. But no matter—better short and good than long and mediocre.

Chris Hoffman



Challenges like this rotating rooms are throwbacks to classic game design, and X8 is all the better for it.

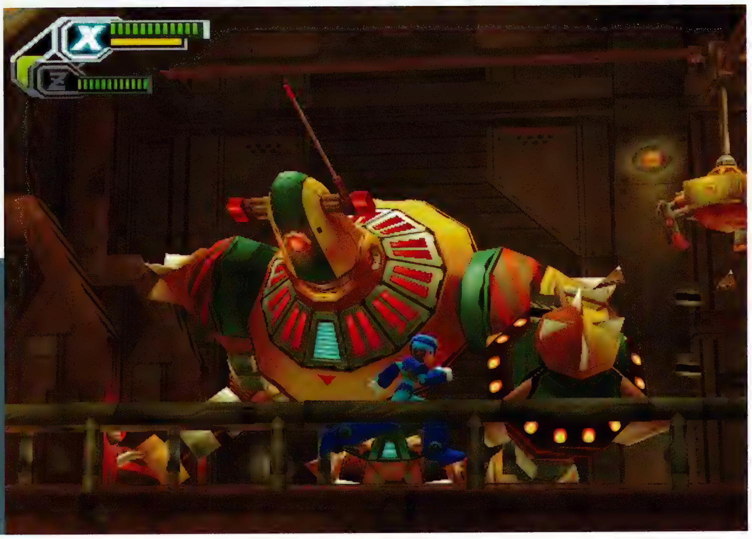
Mega Man X8

+ Traditional 2D Mega Man gameplay finally successfully meshes with modern 3D visuals.

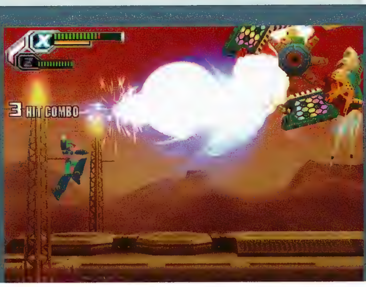
– 3D vehicle stages aren't integrated into the game very well.

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Online: None
Available: December

play Rating ★★★★

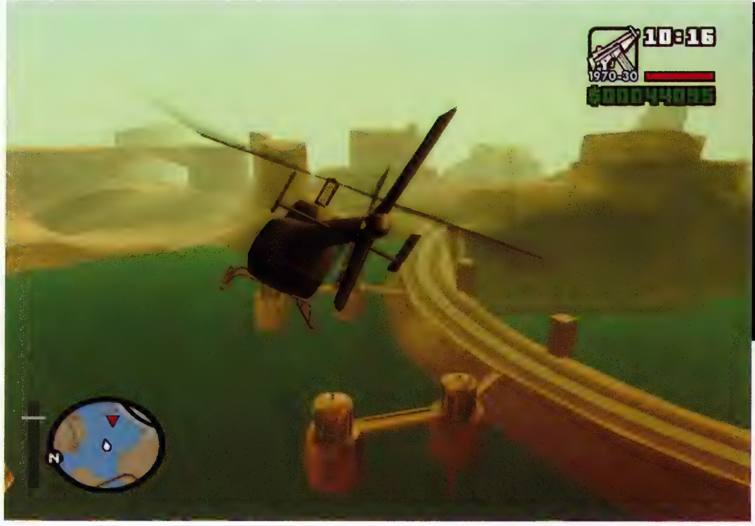


> "...the best original console Mega Man game since the days of the Sega Saturn."



GTA
San Andreas

You're listening to Radio Los Santos



The deafening hype has subsided; millions have traversed the mean streets from Los Santos to Las Venturas—as a chiseled muscle-head, poster child for Good Burger or something in between—and we've all participated in some serious real-life criminal behavior. I thought that maybe the whole charade would lead to some grand epiphany, but at the end of the road there was no message or method to the madness (which, given the turn of events, certainly worked)—just Tenpenny road kill. I suppose the fact that CJ doesn't finish him off with one final shot says something. But for all its diverse locales, layers of story, smart street dialogue and twists and turns, what put San Andreas over the top for me—a game I was sure would never get beyond simply recycling itself—was the combination of better visuals, the individual nuances in the character creation and the countless intermittent payoffs by way of the bike, chopper, dune buggy, parachute, jet, go-kart, hovercraft and so on. Rockstar really mixed it up this time out all the way to the end.

San Andreas is bigger and richer in every way—a near bottomless game painted end-to-end with stuff to do, or not. As far as free-form gaming goes, it remains the pinnacle, Rockstar having consummated the marriage between the cinematic and the mission-based…but there is still one big stride I'd love to see them make. Imagining what a game of this nature will look like on the next generation of consoles both intrigues and frightens me. I really don't need any better realistic killing beyond this. This was as down low as I'll ever be willing to go. If San Andreas was populated by realistic-looking ancillary models, I doubt I'd have liked it as much. My hope is that they make the next GTA more about fighting and maybe honor (like, for instance, if you attached this game design to a Street Fighter or Tekken universe) and less about realistic killing. I mean, they've pretty much run the gamut on murder to this point. I'd like the M to stand for some realistic sexual situations and further sophisticated plot points the next time around rather than merely expelling more ammo at the expense of the next stereotype on the list. Unless, of course, they decide to do GTA DC… Now that would be something. I'd love to shake down some greedy politicians, and imagine where they could take GTA radio. Food for thought. Dave Halverson

> "San Andreas is bigger and richer in every way—a near bottomless game…"

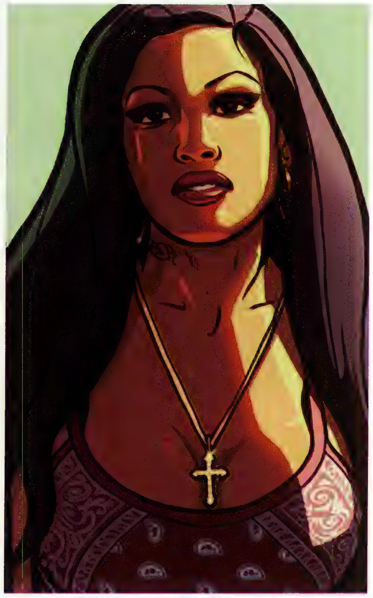
GTA San Andreas

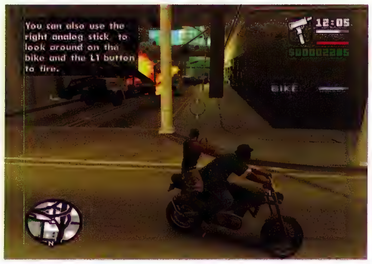
+ The game is gigantic and full of free-form game elements, and GTA radio remains superb.

- It may be too big for casual gamers to ever finish; it's super-violent in the most realistic way, and still rough around the edges.

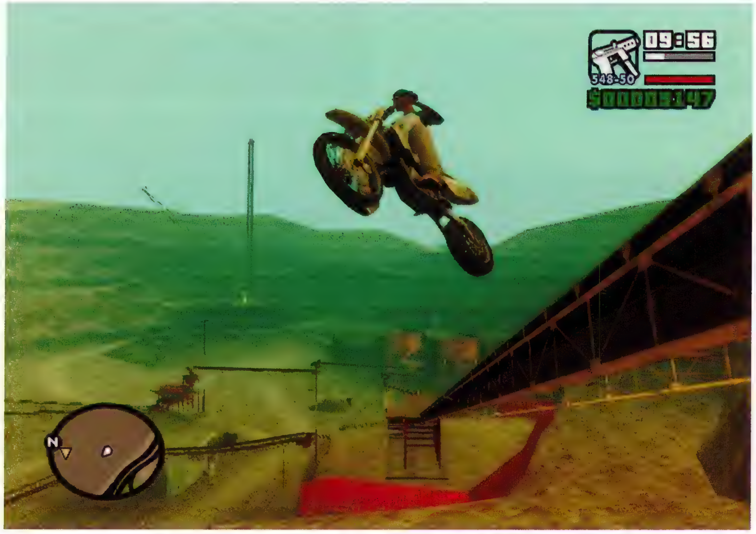
System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Rockstar North
Publisher: Rockstar
Online: None
Available: October

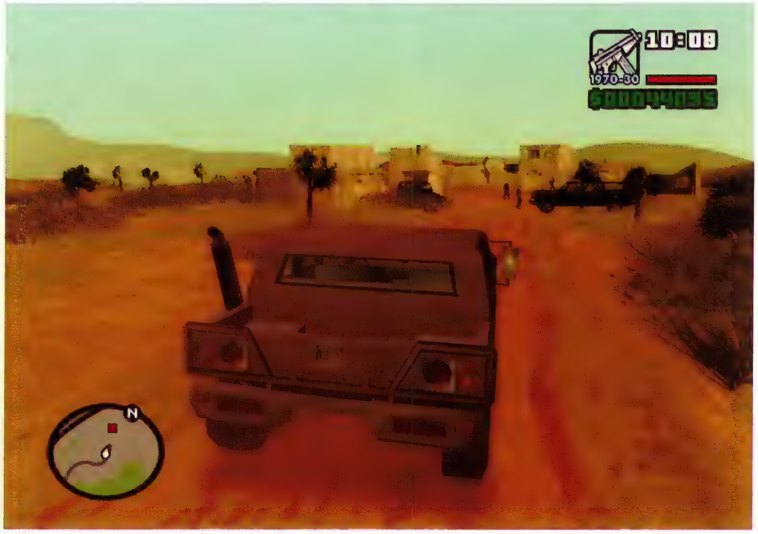
play Rating ★★★★




You can also use the right analog stick to look around on the bike and the L1 button to fire.

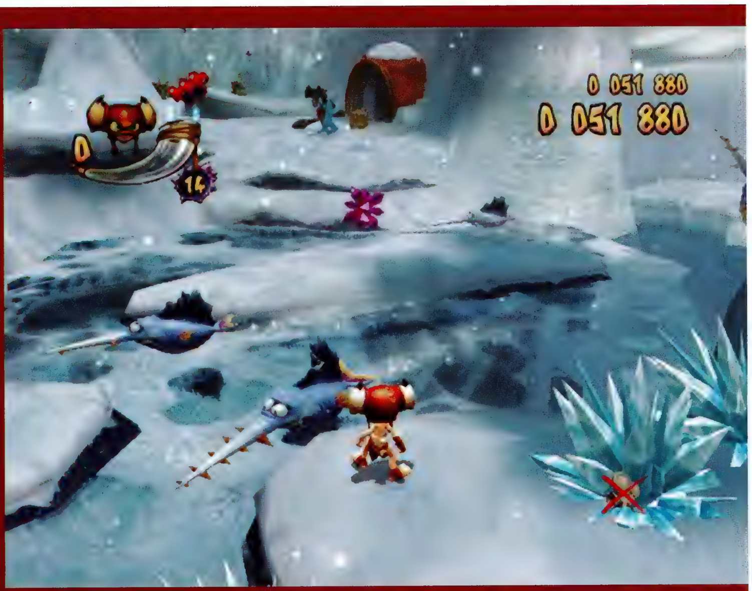
Professional driver on closed course; riding while popping caps is not recommended.

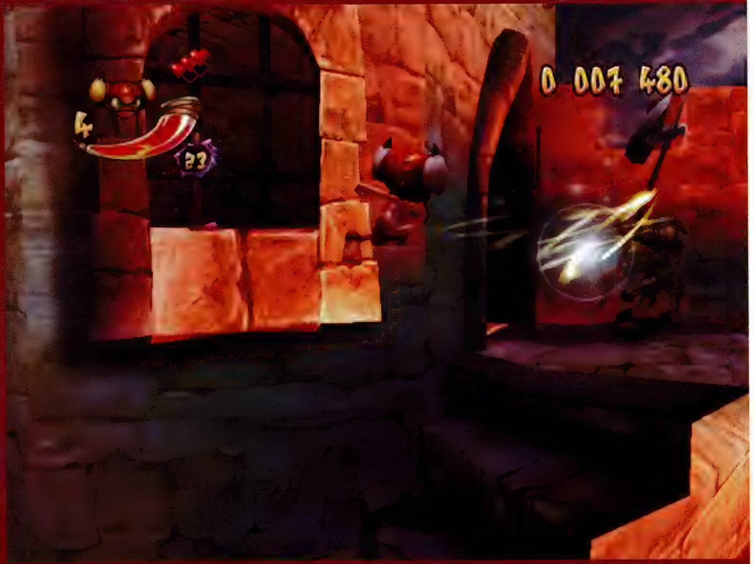




Tork

The power of one





As you play Tork (if you play Tork, which at 20 bucks you better) you should stop every once in a while and wave goodbye, because you'll probably never see another high-profile game riding on such simple parameters. And perhaps rightly so, because in the area of simple run, jump and kill monsters gaming, things really couldn't aspire to much more. Modern platforming icons such as Voodoo Vince, Blinx and Jak incorporate original hooks to stay frosty, but in Tork, the staying power is fueled by stunning graphics (remember those Neo Geo games where you couldn't wait to see the next level and then couldn't stop replaying them?), almost indescribably rich environments and level structure and an ever-increasing degree of difficulty built around four base elements: jumping, dodging, attacking and transforming into spirit animals…a lot like the first Crash Bandicoot (sans the 2D bits and without transformations).

Tiwak has built a game around this simple premise that pulled me in and kept me glued the way games like Sonic, Rayman and said Bandicoot did back in the day—a place I'm normally not so wild about revisiting unless the bar is significantly raised in the areas of character and world design and graphics: the reason we all played games up until complex play mechanics took the stage in the first place. Not to say that Tork is in any way run-of-the-mill; it's simply more about arcade-style fun and upping the technology ante than it is breaking barriers. Elements like real-time erosion and single levels as large as most three-level hubs (so you never traverse the same environment twice) are certainly innovative in this context. But what really makes Tork tick, as with any character action game, is just that—the character—and Tork is without question the coolest cave dweller since the days of Joe and Mac, Bonk and Chuck Rock—the new 3D poster child for prehistoric wunderkind. He controls with the very best of 'em, like Jak and Mario, and he's just hardcore enough to avoid the damning cutesy moniker that has derailed many a would-be critter star.

The only places the game derails are in a slight lack of polish in the cutscenes and the oddly repetitive soundtrack. Of the nine main areas in the game, only two harness what can be considered good platforming music. The rest isn't so much grating as it is forgettable. But at 20 bucks, they could scream obscenities for the duration and it'd still be a fleecing. A game of this caliber (this was to be a first-party Microsoft game) has never been made available day one at this price, so seeing as how they probably won't produce too many, my advice is to grab the kid by the horns while you can.

Dave Halverson

> "…the new 3D poster child for prehistoric wunderkind."

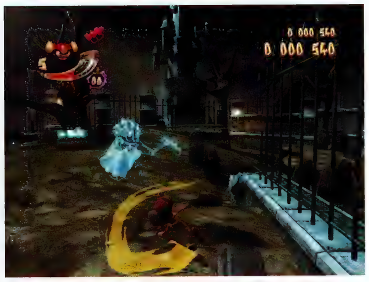
Tork

+ One of the prettiest games ever and wall-to-wall arcade fun. Cool bosses, cool enemies, great art, insane effects.

- Drab soundtrack keeps it from aspiring to greatness, and no hope of a sequel…well, almost no hope.

System: Xbox
Developer: Tiwak
Publisher: Ubisoft
Online: None
Available: January

play Rating ★★★★



The game's cemetary is absolutely breathtaking; the best music is in here too.

Suikoden IV

Barely staying afloat amidst the storm

To be honest, I expected Suikoden IV to be much better than it is. Up until now, all the signs pointed to a classic RPG based upon an emotional foundation of friendship and betrayal, with traditional combat and the 108 Stars of Destiny used as building blocks to form a monument to dramatic storytelling, while enhanced visuals and newly added voiceovers would give the creation a glimmering sheen. But this was not to be; though some of the components are indeed present, they fail to cement into a cohesive whole, and the necessary polish is nowhere in sight.

In some regards, Suikoden IV is quite good. The music is memorable, the fast-paced, menu-driven combat is fun in an old-school way (although it would have been better with the usual six-character battle party), the voice acting is pleasing, the new strategy battles on the high seas are among the most enjoyable the series has offered (even if they are somewhat simple) and the character and world designs are excellent. As with previous Suikoden games, once the hero acquires his stronghold, a tremendous amount of fun is derived from populating it and watching it evolve, and when that includes meeting up with some familiar Suikoden faces, it makes it that much better for longtime fans (especially when a certain rune bearer shows up…oh, and Schtoltheim Reinbach III).

But even as your army grows, things seem amiss; unlike previous Suikoden games, new characters rarely lead to exciting minigames or side quests, and reuniting with old friends sometimes feels strangely feels empty. The narrative, which has always been Suikoden's strongest suite, comes across as incredibly forced, with no attention to characters' personalities or motivations, the biggest offenders being the main character (who is mute and lacks any semblance of personality) and his best friend Snowe, who comes across as an utter jackass instead of garnering any sympathy. I thought of moments like Gremio's sacrifice in Suikoden I, and nothing here comes close. The story is further weakened by severely lacking presentation. Unspectacular graphics are one thing, but when they actually hurt the story, it's another—such as when supposedly massive battles are nearly unpopulated, giving them almost zero impact. On top of story woes, navigating Suikoden IV's oceanic overworld is a chore, as invisible barriers and the ships' sluggish handling may make one think that their controller is broken. The problems all seem to boil down to a distinct lack of production values, which, considering the size of a company like Konami and the viability of the Suikoden franchise, is inexcusable.

As much as I enjoyed Suikoden IV in some respects, I was equally pained to see how many opportunities were missed in others. Fans of bigger-name RPGs are likely to be put off by Suikoden IV's lack of visual punch, and even role-playing die-hards may be let down by the storytelling. If Konami invests the proper resources, Suikoden could become as big as any RPG franchise in the industry, but they're certainly not there yet. Chris Hoffman

Suikoden IV

+ Collecting the 108 Stars of Destiny is a blast. An engrossing game world.

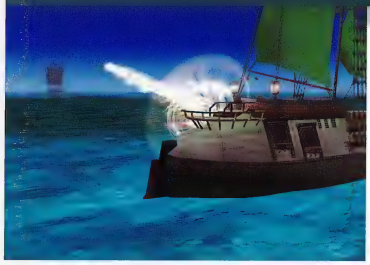
- A lack of production values and a forced narrative drags the whole experience down.

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: KCE Tokyo
Publisher: Konami
Online: None
Available: January

play Rating ★★⯪☆

"As much as I enjoyed Suikoden IV in some respects, I was equally pained to see how many opportunities were missed in others."

This guardian won't let you through the ruins without a fight...or two.

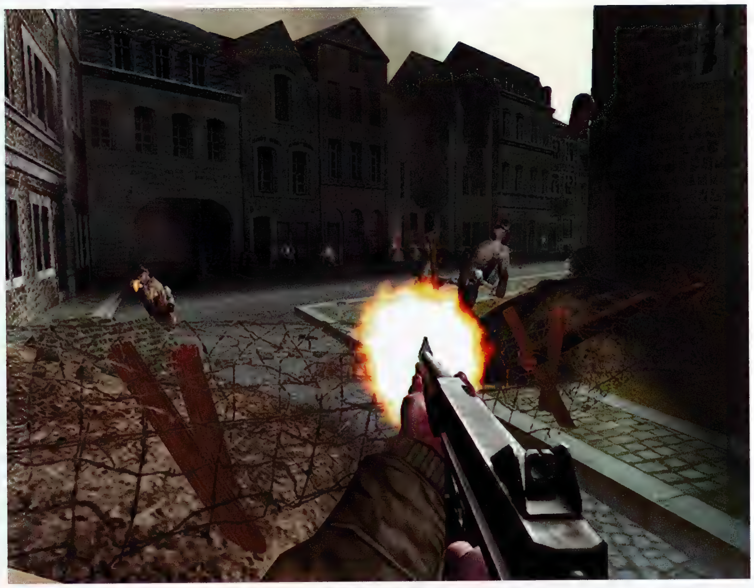


Call of Duty
Finest Hour

Respectfully and engagingly detailing the intrigue of World War II

I can't even begin to imagine what it must be like to take part in war, staring down another human being in the sights of a gun. Paralyzing and horrific obviously come to mind. Funny how the tragic thought of war so readily intrigues for the foundation of a game.

One of Call of Duty: Finest Hour's wise moves in its pursuit to play off the raw, contextual emotion of World War II is an avoidance of shock value. It is more concerned with fascinating historical setting and exciting scenes of all-encompassing, mass-battlefield action than personal infliction of exploding limbs and forced violence. A certain detachment exists; you won't be treated to nonsense like body-shot rankings and overt realism.



Authentic-looking weapons and set pieces place you directly in the grip of WWII.

The game takes place across several hot spots in Europe and Africa, following the brief stories of several soldiers from the Allied Forces. A bit of humanity is brought to the game as the characters reflect on their missions and chatter during the firestorm, but the game really misses an opportunity to cut far deeper.

> "It is more concerned with fascinating historical setting and exciting scenes of all-encompassing, mass-battlefield action..."

Rarely does Call of Duty: Finest Hour miss as an assault on the senses. Soldiers convincingly collapse and move; whether crawling through the trenches as mortars explode and bullets whistle over head, driving a heavy tank down an active runway as planes attempt to take off, or cocking and firing a sniper rifle from a perch in a warehouse, the sharp, dynamic sounds flow around the fantastic visual details; a dramatic orchestra fills the scene with even more

emotion.

There's something extremely appealing about firing off the antiquated weapons in the game, which are often more interesting than most of the over-designed space-aged blasters. I love the urgency of a slow-to-load rifle, the way your fumbling and learned cadence strikes a unique tension in the shootouts; too bad the clumsy grenades aren't nearly as much fun.

Of course, there's an online section to the game, but it continues the trend of sameness: capture the flag, deathmatch, you get the idea. If you're on the PS2 only, it actually is a decent addition against so little else, but Xbox just has too much competition to get too excited. So settle in to the incredible intensity and powerful visuals of the single-player experience; it's the best World War II game on console since the height of Medal of Honor.

Brady Fiechter

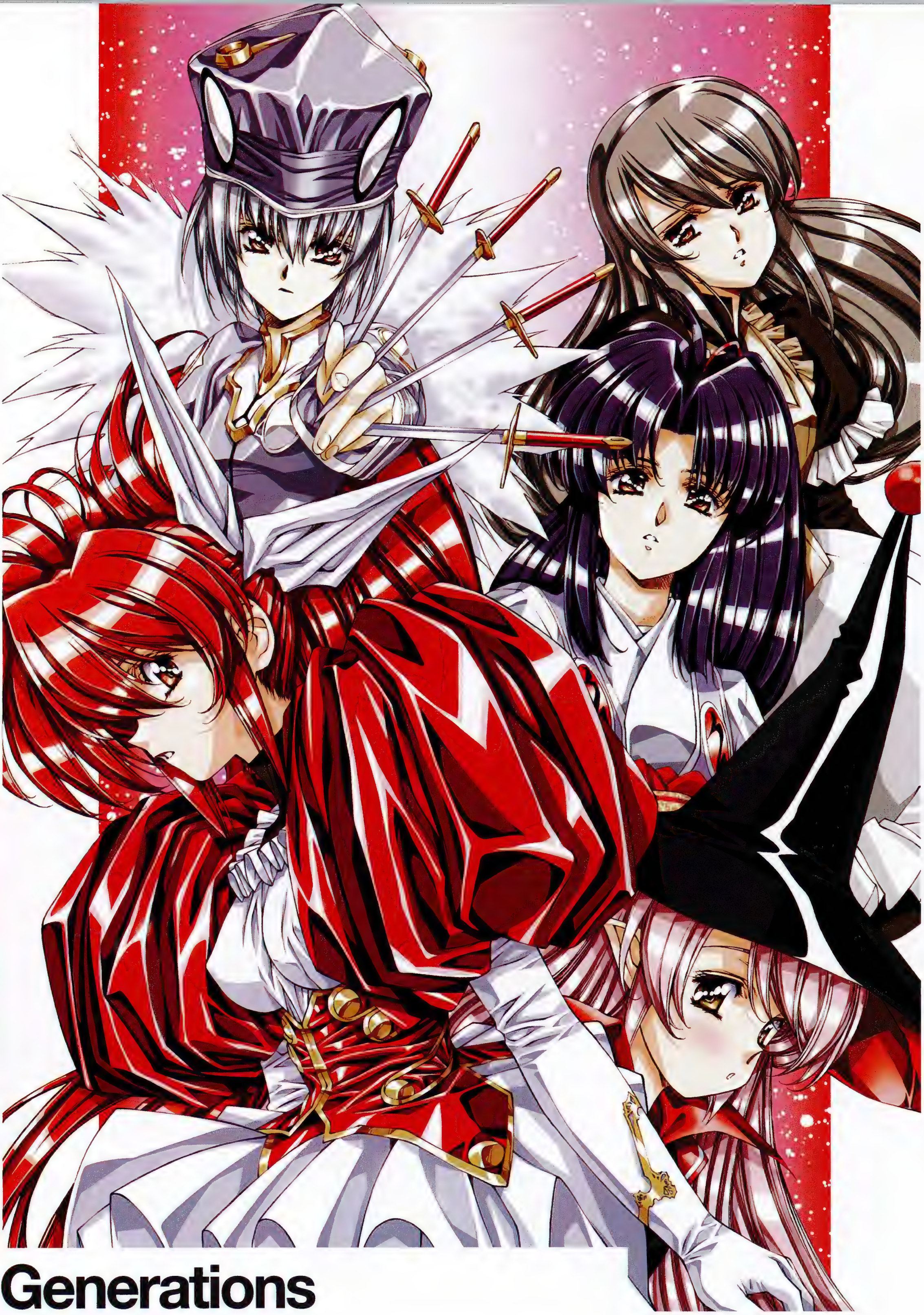
Call of Duty: Finest Hour

+ Finally, Medal of Honor from years ago isn't the only great World War II FPS.

- Some of those on-rails missions don't quite cut it, and the game gets artificially difficult.

System: PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube
Developer: Spark
Publisher: Activision
Online: Multiplayer
Available: November

play Rating ★★★½



Growlanser Generations

It's really starting to *grow* on me…

All puns aside, Growlanser Generations is some serious bang for your buck. Two full RPGs lie within Generations: Growlanser II: The Sense of Justice and Growlanser III: The Dual Darkness. If you've ever loved strategy-based RPGs, you're gonna like this.

Growlanser II puts you in control of Wein Cruz, an aspiring Imperial Knight trying to rid the world of evil. Your choices and responses to people determine your path in the game, not only through conversations with main characters, but the townspeople too. In fact, your decisions at the very beginning of the game when your commander asks you about your battle abilities are key—closing off certain abilities or leading to specific proficiencies in combat—causing you to really consider your options whilst fighting or conversing.

The battle system in Grow II and III is what really makes them stand out. The use of a Ring Weapon that creates a specific weapon according to the wearer makes buying arms a thing of the past, lifting the burden of buying new weaponry at each town you arrive in. There is also a Ring Gem system that allows you to place up to three gems in your equipped ring, linked to attributes, abilities and defenses, oh-so-very-faintly reminiscent of the materia system in Final Fantasy VII. While I compare, I must say that the system is quite unlike anything I've used before, and it really did make the game unique in that right.

Something you're going to immediately notice in both games is the old-school graphics…of which you're likely either a fan or not. Either way, both encompass lush storylines (although Grow III is certainly more depressing than Grow II) and so many different paths to take that if you

> "If you've ever loved strategy-based RPGs, you're gonna like this."

enjoy strategy-based RPGs, you're more than covered. Anime fans will especially appreciate the 2D artwork, which is pretty sweet in both games.

Another great aspect of the compilation is the length being offered: In a world where we see games with mostly 10-20 hour finish times, Generations is long, encompassing up to 160 hours of game play (if you so desire to view the multiple endings, of which Working Designs states that it will take at least eight play-throughs to unlock everything in The Sense of Justice alone). Another nice little bone they threw to us die-hard RPG perfectionists is the ability to carry over your Ring Weapons and gems into your next play-through. Even though every additional play-through gets easier as you beef up your characters with ungodly rings and gems, both games present a unique difficulty in that, in order to get the perfect ending, you must complete the game with all "Mission Completes." For every battle you undertake, you have four endings: Mission Complete (in which you fulfill all the criteria without anyone dying), Mission Clear (where you finish the battle, but certain criteria were not met), Mission Failed and Game Over (both pretty self-explanatory). I know, I know, you're looking at me and saying, "Yeah, yeah, I'm the RPG king of my block," but I should warn you now that these games are tough. I died a fair few times shortly into the game, especially in III, which changes quite a bit from II as you're sent back a millennia to the beginnings of the Growlanser universe, on a different planet than II, playing as Slayn Wilder. Here you'll also find dungeons (a la Chrono Trigger) and an overhead, free-moving world map, opposed to II, which employs a linear map that does not allow you to wander through cities or the general world, opting instead for navigation via overhead dialogue boxes. The system in III is quite enjoyable. It's certainly a breath of fresh air knocking on citizens' doors in the hope they'll answer instead of the usual loot-raiding in other RPGs. I got a good laugh when I knocked on someone's door and they answered it, said something and proceeded to slam the door in my face.

Character interaction is something Working Designs aced in Growlanser Generations. The voice work is astounding, featuring over 7000 voice clips in Grow II alone, the translations for audio and text for the games being very well executed. The music had me slightly confused in Grow II though, since the overhead map was this light, airy medieval-type music, and when I went into battle, it did a 180 turn into something like a cross between upbeat '80s pop and J-Pop. Gamers might be a little put off by Grow II's overall score, but Grow III has a nice blend of music that fits nicely with the tone of the game.

Growlanser II and III are not your run-of-the-mill RPGs, but they certainly have those familiar elements to them that make you all warm and fuzzy inside. The combination of not one, but two sprawling, vast worlds teeming with life make this collection well worth the wait. Ashley Esqueda

Growlanser Generations

+ Two games in one collection = sweet strategy-RPG goodness.

- Throwback visual style may or may not be your cup of tea.

System: PlayStation 2

Developer: Atlus/CareerSoft

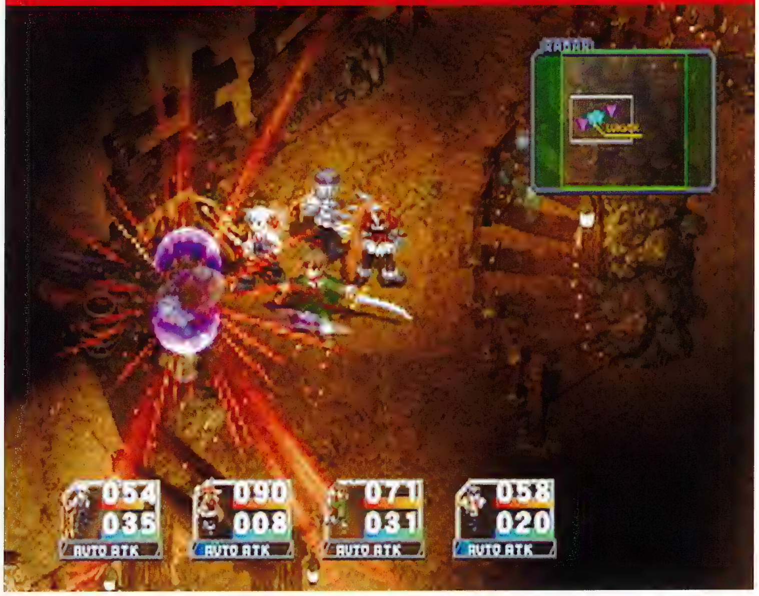
Publisher: Working Designs

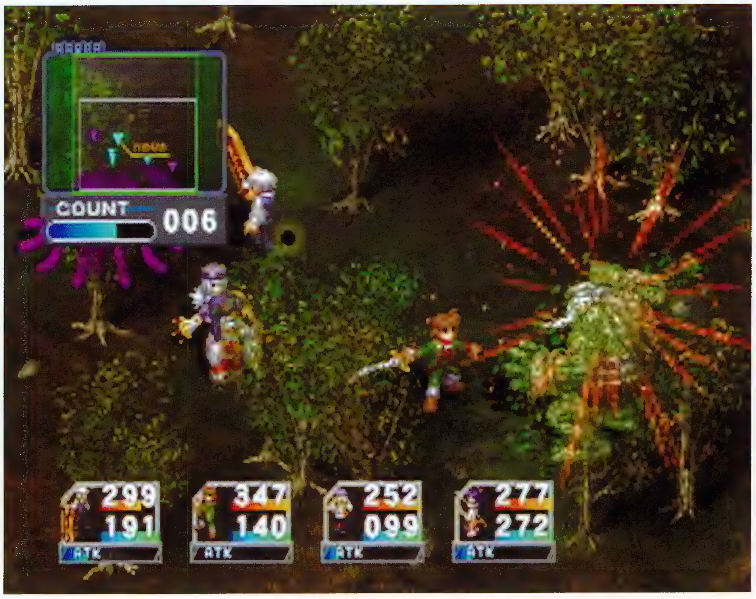
Online: None

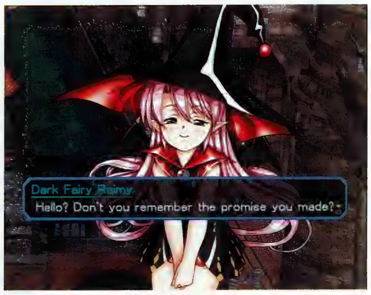
Available: December

play Rating ★★★½

A large number of skills and attacks are available to crush the enemy.

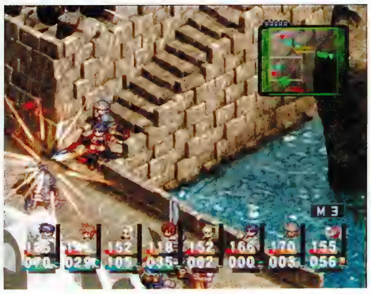






Dark Fairy Raimy

Hello? Don't you remember the promise you made?



Metal Gear Solid 3

Snake Eater

A delicious feast

When MGS3 begins, this man is known as Snake. By the end, he'll be called Big Boss.

Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater is a rollercoaster thrill ride, constantly zipping from high point to high point. Whether quietly maneuvering through a waterway to sneak into an enemy warehouse, shooting down a helicopter with intense firepower, disguising yourself for a nerve-wracking laboratory infiltration, engaging in a drawn-out test of wills against a wily sharpshooter, crossing a leech-infested swamp or making a daring escape from a high-security military base punctuated by a dive from atop a waterfall, the edge-of-your-seat action is incredibly intense and perfectly paced. Combined with ties to real-life events, the immersion level is off the charts, to the point that when the Major tells Snake that he must never be spotted on his mission, you completely believe him.

From a gameplay perspective, MGS3 is an exceptional blend of stealth and action. The new camo feature prepares Snake well for stealthy infiltration, but if he gets spotted—and he likely will, since the guards are more alert than ever before—he's equally prepared to fight his way out. The close-quarters combat moves are a rush once you've mastered the subtleties of the controls, and Snake's arsenal will grow to include everything from tranquilizer guns to rocket launchers. New gameplay elements—the camo, the catching of food, the curing of wounds—are also incorporated nicely into the proceedings. It's rather amazing how much MGS has changed, yet it still feels completely natural.

No less impressive is the presentation. MGS3 is a thing of beauty, boasting amazing textures that seem to never repeat, propelled to new heights by an exquisite use of color. Nothing was omitted: lush vegetation with individually modeled leaves...the sun's rays cracking through the treetops...the feel of the dust kicking up beneath Snake's feet...the subtle shifting of the underbrush...the soft deflection of the rain...meticulously modeled indigenous wildlife, right down to the ambiance of the butterflies. In one area, vultures even arrive to feed on the bodies of the slain. Inorganic environments, from gritty concrete tunnels to ridiculously detailed office interiors, are equally marvelous, and character models are impeccable. Kudos as well to the sound design, which creates a completely enveloping experience, even on lesser sound systems.

> "...the edge-of-your-seat action is incredibly intense and perfectly paced. Combined with ties to real-life events, the immersion level is off the charts..."

MGS3's story in some ways can be likened to *The Empire Strikes Back*—a solid basis in adventure, along with great character development (the connections to other MGS games are fascinating), a heavy dose of darkness and just enough humor to keep things balanced. Of course, this being a Hideo Kojima game, Snake Eater also has its share of plot twists and underhanded backstabbings that will keep you guessing until the end, but more in an MGS1 way than MGS2. Things never get too convoluted, and no one is having an Oedipus complex. Although Snake Eater carries a poignant message, it doesn't mind stopping to provide a dry laugh by poking fun at certain elements of MGS2.

MGS3 isn't perfect—an on-screen map and a quick way to change camouflage would have been nice, and it often seems that an over-the-shoulder camera would have suited the game better—but it's still, for me, the best game I've played in 2004.
Chris Hoffman

Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater

+ A banquet of great gameplay, stunning visuals, fantastic audio and an excellent story.

– Some menus and camerawork slow things down.

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: KCE Japan
Publisher: Konami
Online: Downloadable content
Available: November

play Rating ★★★★

The Snake vs. Monkey bonus mode is a lighthearted break from Snake's main mission.

Interview

Harry Gregson-Williams, composer for Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater

play: How did it feel to be asked to return to Metal Gear Solid, one of the biggest franchises in all of gaming?
Harry Gregson-Williams: It felt great. I was thrilled that [director/producer] Hideo [Kojima] asked me to be a part of MGS3 after we had such a fruitful and interesting collaboration on MGS2.

What did you learn from creating the score of MGS2 that you were able to apply to MGS3?
I learned that the experience of scoring a game was nothing like scoring a movie and that I had to depend heavily on scripted scenarios given to me by the game makers rather than visuals given to me by filmmakers. Do understand that in the process of doing both these games, never once was I scoring to "picture." I had no visuals to work with, only words!

How did the '60s setting and theme of MGS3 influence your compositions?
Hugely. This was the era of the Cold War, and Hideo was keen for the music to reflect this. This, together with the fact that MGS3 is set in a jungle environment, gave me plenty of possibilities to go to musical places not visited in Metal Gear before.

Were there any challenges that you personally wanted to accomplish through this game's music?
Each project is a challenge of its own. No two projects are the same even if created by the same people. I am constantly reinventing myself for directors I have worked with for years. Hideo was no exception to this rule. I suppose I didn't ask myself what challenge I wanted to accomplish but rather welcomed the challenge at hand.

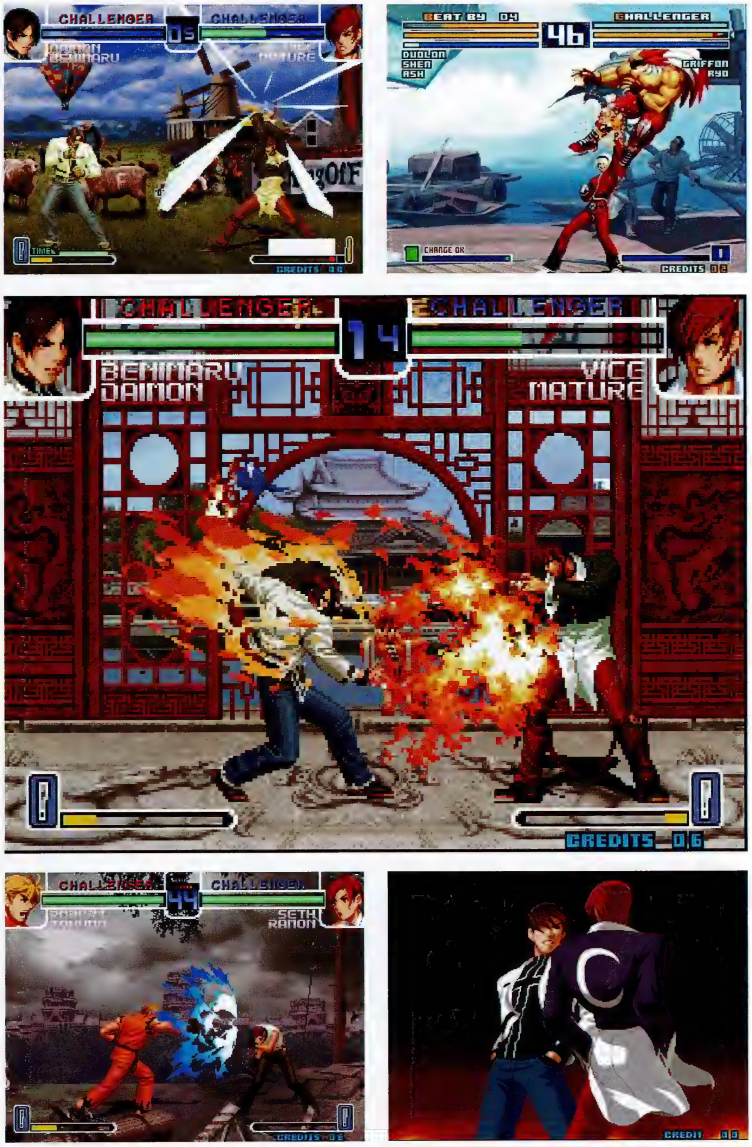
Musically speaking, what's your favorite scene in MGS3 and why?
It is hard for me to point [to] my favorite scene. As I said earlier, I was writing music only to situations such as: "the character will run through the jungle and eventually bump into a nuclear plant." The first piece I ever wrote for the game was for the E3 convention. Hideo came to visit me and showed me how the presentation would look with the score I had written. It really blew me away.

Have you enjoyed composing game music, and is it something you'd like to explore further?
I would absolutely like to pursue this type of scoring further. As time goes by, it seems video games have become more and more intricate. The characters and the story are more and more complex, and I am stunned of the visual development. It's not just about shooting aliens anymore. I really enjoyed working with Hideo and everyone else at Konami. They are truly great visionaries. **play**

> "Hideo came to visit me and showed me how the presentation would look with the score I had written. It really blew me away."
>
> Harry Gregson-Williams, composer for Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater

The King of Fighters '02/'03

Less predictable than you might think



Familiar characters and explosive special moves remain part of the KOF formula.

"Enter King of Fighters 2003—and suddenly the franchise is imbued with new life."

I admit, even I was growing a bit tired of King of Fighters. For the past 10 years, installment after installment, this series has consistently delivered precise, high-quality 2D fighting action based around three-on-three team battles; but after so many sequels, even ardent SNK supporters had to realize that the formula was starting to wear a bit thin. Enter King of Fighters 2003—and suddenly the franchise is imbued with new life.

With one simple change, everything old in KOF is new again, and that change is an actual tag system that allows players to swap characters at almost any time. Not a groundbreaking innovation to be sure, but one that adds much-needed energy to KOF and instantly makes the game that much more fun, with a lightning-quick pace and more action than ever before. Necessary roster changes have also occurred; I'm sad to see old Choi and Andy Bogard go, but it's definitely needed for the series to stay fresh, and newcomers like Tizoc, Ash and Maki are appreciated additions to the roster, unlike past years where some new characters weren't much fun. While the visuals are still grounded in the old Neo Geo hardware, 3D backgrounds have been added to the PS2 version (although the original backgrounds are still selectable), and the soundtrack is one of KOF's best (available in both original and remixed forms). The new story direction is quite promising as well.

As good as King of Fighters 2003 is, it's only half the package—KOF 2002 is packed with it. Unlike '03, however, '02 doesn't strive to innovate; in fact, it's more of a throwback to older KOFs, as it abandons the striker system in lieu of three-on-three action at its technical best and delivers its classic action in somewhat of a "dream match" format, featuring 40 favorite characters (plus hidden fighters) from KOFs gone by. Slightly trickier controls for super moves and a modified system for desperations don't improve the gameplay any, and although additional modes like Team Attack are nice, the result is a game that isn't any better than its predecessors.

But for me, KOF '02 is more of a bonus. For 2D fighting fans, King of Fighters 2003 is reason enough to pick this pair up. This may be the last chance to experience KOF before it graduates to entirely new technology, and as it just so happens, this set may contain the best King of Fighters yet. Chris Hoffman

The King of Fighters '02/'03

+ Two high-precision 2D fighters, one of which actually evolves the KOF formula.

- KOF 2002 is fun but a bit stale; dated visuals.

System: PlayStation 2 (reviewed), Xbox
Developer: SNK Playmore
Publisher: SNK Neo Geo USA
Online: NA
Available: February

play Rating ★★★☆

ATV Offroad Fury 3

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Climax
Publisher: Sony
Online: Multiplayer
Available: November
play Rating ★★☆☆

If you ask me, by the time a series has a 3 attached to it, it had better be perfection, but this is not the case with ATVOF3, a game that, were it not for the online component, really shouldn't exist. Within the single mode events, this is step backward in every way, from the handling (preloading is soft and unresponsive, and the bar cam is a static nightmare) to the graphics to course design. This leaves the game's sole selling point the online play, in which you can race and chat with up to four other players, something you can do with far better games than this. I'm beginning to really worry about Climax. Have they bitten off more than they can chew? D. Halverson

GoldenEye: Rogue Agent

System: PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube
Developer: EALA
Publisher: EA
Online: Multiplayer (PS2, Xbox)
Available: November
play Rating ★★☆☆

When I played GoldenEye for preview, its first few levels got me pumped. But play to the end and you start to see levels that all feel the same, lose interest in the loose story, notice glaring design flaws and, more than anything else, realize just how far superior many of the recent first-person shooters really are. The production's decent enough, but there's such a sense of mechanical design, with flat personality and little flair. The cool idea of deathtraps never takes off, the dual weapons system is underutilized, and worst of all is the enemy presence; they look neat moving around and employ engaging physics, but they provide no intelligent attacks, often running around without firing a shot. One of the year's surprise disappointments. Brady Fiechter

×008
174
006000

Sega Superstars

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Sonic Team
Publisher: Sega
Online: None
Available: November
play Rating ★★★☆

Like most games for the EyeToy, Sega Superstars isn't a title that you'd likely want to spend much time with alone, but can be a good deal of fun in a party environment or for younger players. Twelve minigames pump out the variety, and Sega characters make Superstars more fun than similar efforts. Not all the minigames have equal success—Virtua Fighter, House of the Dead, NiGHTS, Samba de Amigo, Sonic and Puyo Pop are among the best, while Billy Hatcher just isn't responsive enough, and the screaming, body-flailing antics of Crazy Taxi are only for the mentally challenged. Chris Hoffman

Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone

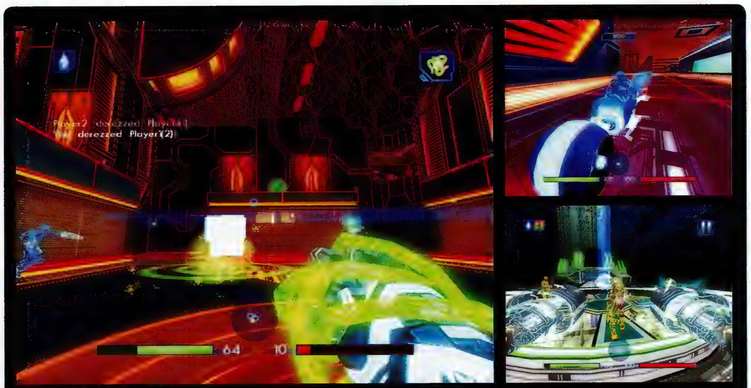
System: Xbox
Developer: Stormfront
Publisher: Atari
Online: None
Available: November
play Rating ★★★☆

Rarely do games with this much story aspire to much more than overhead beaters or point-and-click PC games weighed down with subtext, so on that level DS is a revelation. The game's biggest flaw is a lack of the contact high one gets from clashing with vile beasts, as the conflicts here lack that steel-on-steel collision that lets you know you've laid deeply into whatever it is you're fighting. The fixed environs make for some kooky camera angles too, and jumping with that little imbedded black button? No. Otherwise, this is as beautiful a game of this ilk I've ever played; I mean, who can argue with this level of artistry? If I'm gonna go along for the scripted ride, I may as well enjoy the view, of which it's sweeter than ever on Xbox with speedy load times. Dave Halverson

Virtua Quest

System: PlayStation 2, GameCube
Developer: Sega
Publisher: Sega
Online: None
Available: January
play Rating ★★⯪☆

In Sega's Total Recall-meets-.hack action/adventure about a future so bleak people flee to the safety of the virtual plane (which is, of course, being corrupted), pineapple-haired Sei finds himself knee-deep in virtual purgatory. Diving into the Nexus' forgotten servers to find old data chips, he gets a lot more than he bargained for when logging out becomes dependent on defeating root users by synching with the copied ghosts of VF characters drawn into the realm by a fake tourney they were baited to in order to copy their moves for the manufacture of Durals. A cool concept (handled PSO style) for sure, that's unfortunately tethered to stiff controls, an antiquated camera with no look button, and gameplay devices ripe for retirement. Dave Halverson

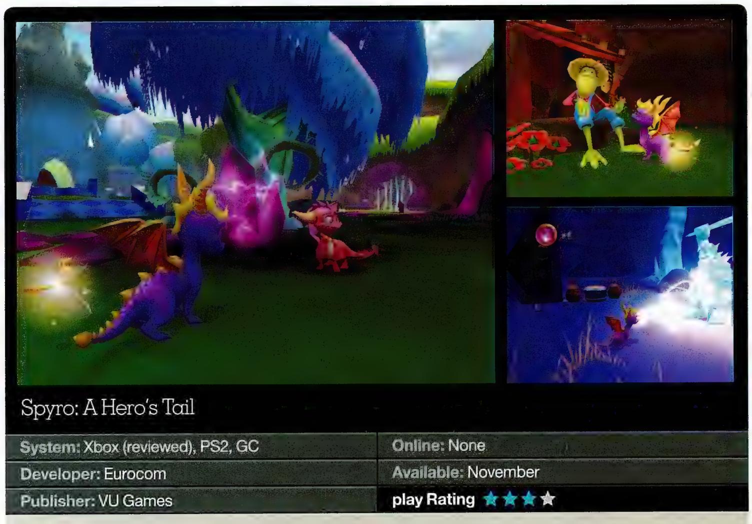


Tron 2.0: Killer App

System: Xbox
Developer: Climax
Publisher: Buena Vista Interactive
Online: Multiplayer
Available: November
play Rating ★★★☆

While I didn't spend a whole lot of time with the well-received Tron on PC, this transport to Xbox struck me as less satisfying, losing its visual pop—perhaps a bit more important than usual given the game's unique look. But comparison aside, Tron 2.0: Killer App had no problem succeeding as a fun, distinct, solidly made first-person shooter elevated by stretches of light cycle competition. Sure, nostalgic draw from the classic film helps pull you into this faithfully inspired universe, but on its own, the game works just fine. The actual shooting elements are fairly standard FPS convention, with upgrades and some customization earnings as you move forward mixing things up a bit. Online's not bad at all, but certainly nothing that will keep you locked in for hours. Brady Fiechter

> "...a fun, distinct, solidly made first-person shooter elevated by stretches of light cycle competition."

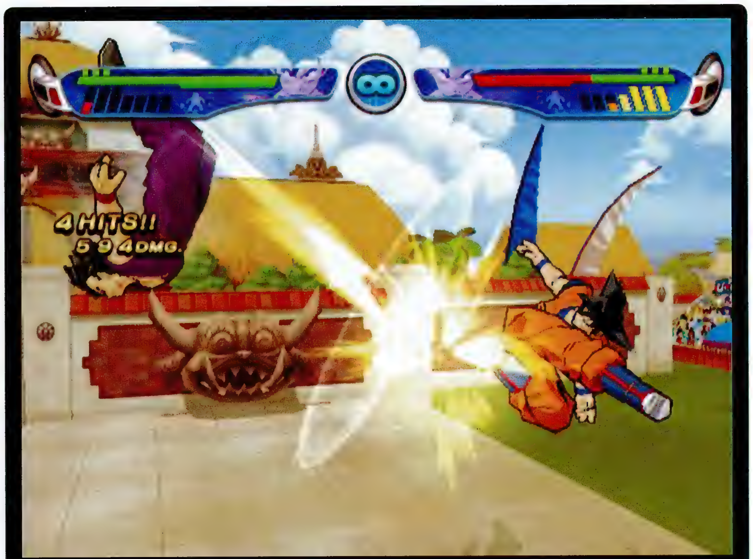


Spyro: A Hero's Tail

System: Xbox (reviewed), PS2, GC
Developer: Eurocom
Publisher: VU Games
Online: None
Available: November
play Rating ★★★☆

My biggest concern going into A Hero's Tail was that the bit players would occupy too much quality time; nothing worse than a character action game that squanders its core asset. But this fab four (of which Sgt. Byrd is a Pilotwinger's dream come true) merely scout for Dragon Eggs and Light Gems in their own private levels sprinkled sporadically throughout each world. Otherwise, this is Spyro's show, and a wondrous adventure filled with great gameplay it is. Eurocom has finally delivered a Spyro worthy of the namesake, filling this game with enchanting music, wonderfully textured worlds and enough play mechanics to keep platformers bug-eyed for the duration. Beware the platformer haters on this one and fire at will. Dave Halverson

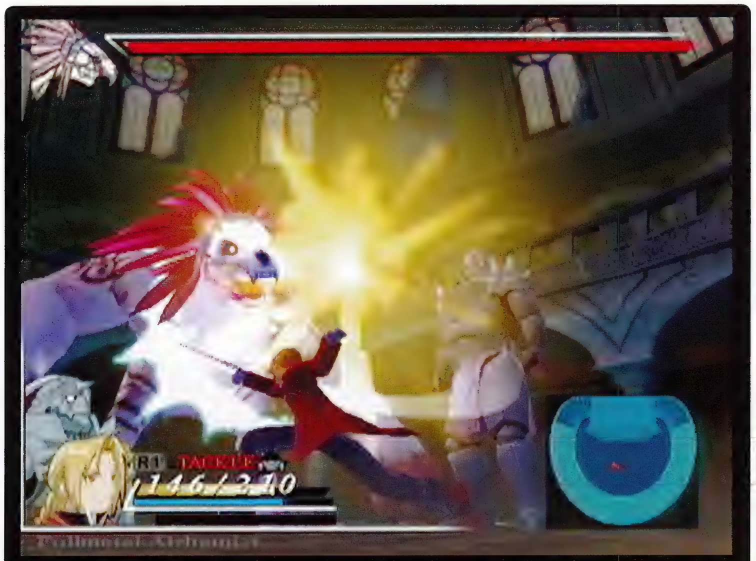
> "...this is Spyro's show, and a wondrous adventure filled with great gameplay it is."



Dragon Ball Z Budokai 3

System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Dimps
Publisher: Atari
Online: None
Available: November
play Rating ★★☆☆

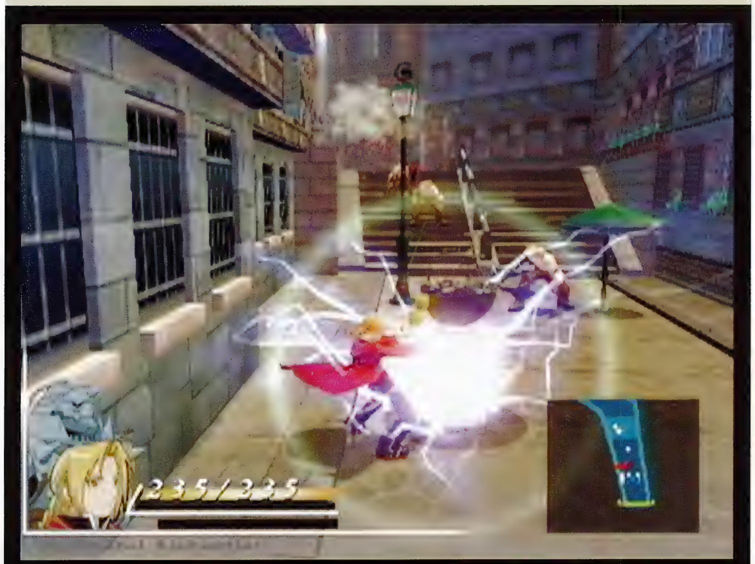
Dragon Ball Z Budokai 3 is far and away the best game in this series, but unfortunately, the creators have still neglected to address the lackluster fighting at the core. With only a handful of special moves and combos per character—and still no ability to jump, duck or fly on command—added nuances like dodging and teleportation counters aren't as meaningful as they could be. In lieu of fulfilling action, Budokai 3 offers a faithful re-creation of the entire DBZ cartoon series, letting fans take their favorite characters through familiar stories (much better than Budokai 2's board game mode), even awarding bonuses for accurately re-enacting each battle. DBZ fans will probably love it; others should look elsewhere for their fighting fix. Chris Hoffman



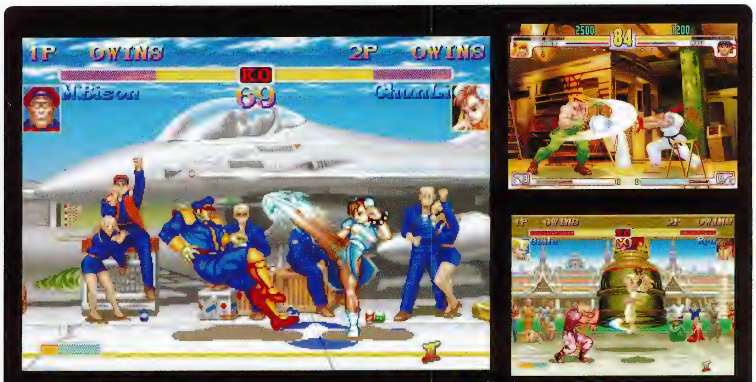
Fullmetal Alchemist

System: PlayStation 2	**Online:** None
Developer: Racjin Co., Ltd.	**Available:** December
Publisher: Square Enix	**play Rating** ★★★★

What Full Metal Alchemist lacks in visual punch, visa vie simplistic geometry and slightly stiff animation, it more than makes up for in level design, story and especially technique as Ed and his brother Alphonse (damaged from the aftermath of trying to resurrect their mother) journey towards their goal of merely becoming whole. Ed can bend nearly anything in his proximity into a weapon and, when all else fails, call upon Alphonse's girth for protection, within levels structured in a way that doing so with cunning is key. The story is, of course, spectacular—following in the footsteps of the brilliant anime—not to mention humorous. Not bad for a pair of siblings whose younger half has dissipated into a silly-looking suit of armor. Dave Halverson



"The story is, of course, spectacular—following in the footsteps of the brilliant anime..."

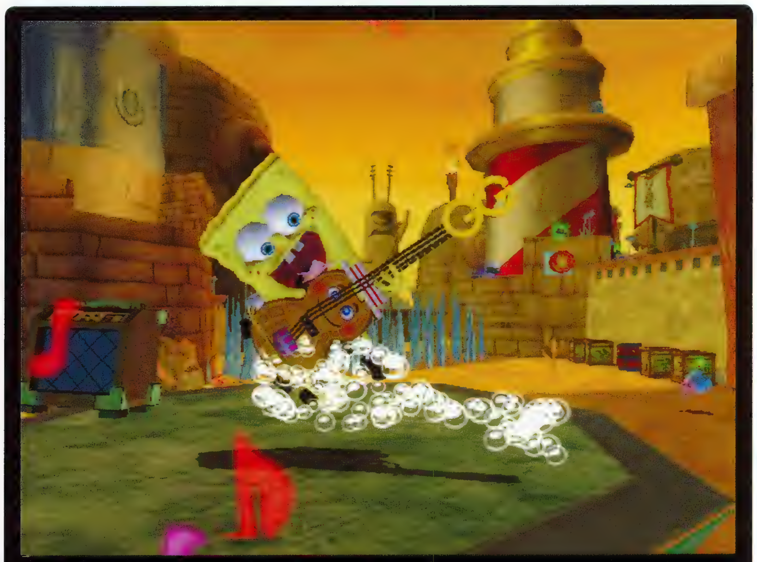


Street Fighter Anniversary Collection

System: Xbox	**Online:** 2p versus
Developer: Capcom	**Available:** February
Publisher: Capcom	**play Rating** ★★★★

Any good Street Fighter fan likely owns Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike—often cited as the pinnacle of the series, yet my money's on Alpha 3—along with the more seminal yet exceedingly rickety Street Fighter II additions—all of which make up this very cool if not very esoteric Street Fighter Anniversary Collection for Xbox. Do you need to obsessively apply it to your collection, forced to play on a control pad that doesn't feel quite right, pounding out the incredibly precise 2D moves? On its own, I wouldn't, but the big deal here is going Live; I really am looking forward to playing friends who have moved across country, recapturing the good old days. Classic Street Fighter's time hasn't passed just yet... Brady Fiechter

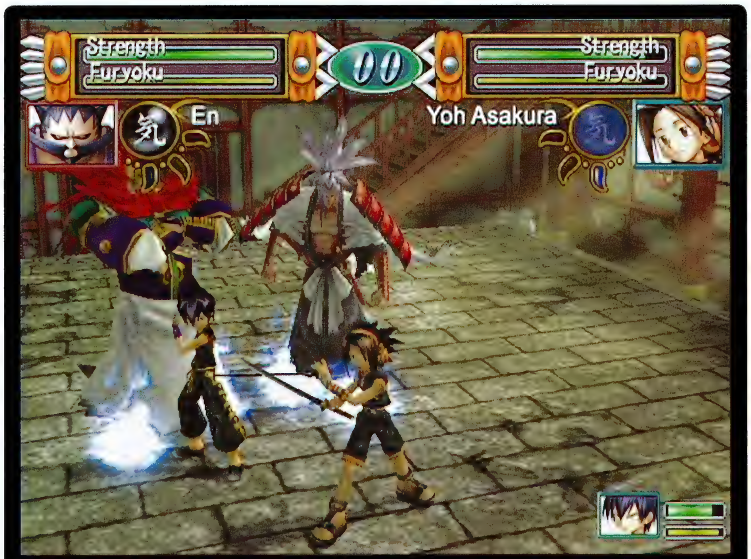
"...I really am looking forward to playing friends who have moved across country, recapturing the good old days."



SpongeBob Squareparts Movie

System: PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube	**Online:** None
Developer: Heavy Iron	**Available:** December
Publisher: THQ	**play Rating** ★★★★

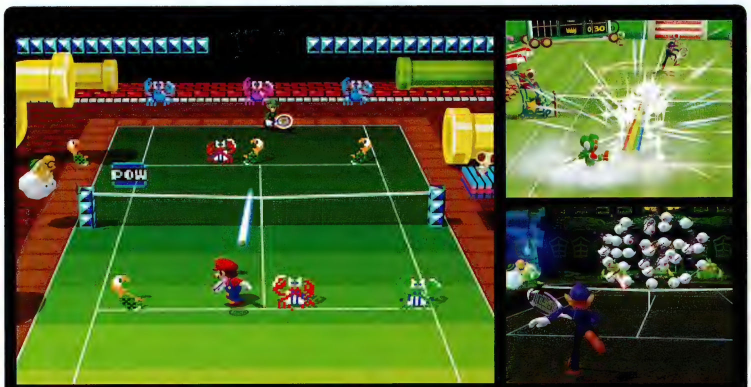
Heavy Iron set the bar pretty high with their last sponge-capade, Battle for Bikini Bottom, and while I really can't see them making a better SpongeBob game on the current round of hardware, they've certainly delivered as well as can be expected. Highlights include a colorful world and requisite loony gameplay scenarios—including some infinitely cool derby challenges behind the wheel of a Crabby Patty, a drunken (on ice cream) binge, tongue sliding and Spongeboarding—and the game is designed in such a way that it behooves the player to not just pass levels but excel at them. When that includes performing acts like SpongeBob's Sonic Wave Guitar and Patrick Star's cartwheel, well, that's just plain absorbing. Dave Halverson



Shonen Jump's Shaman King: Power of Spirit

System: PlayStation 2	**Online:** None
Developer: KCE Japan	**Available:** November
Publisher: Konami	**play Rating** ★★⯪☆

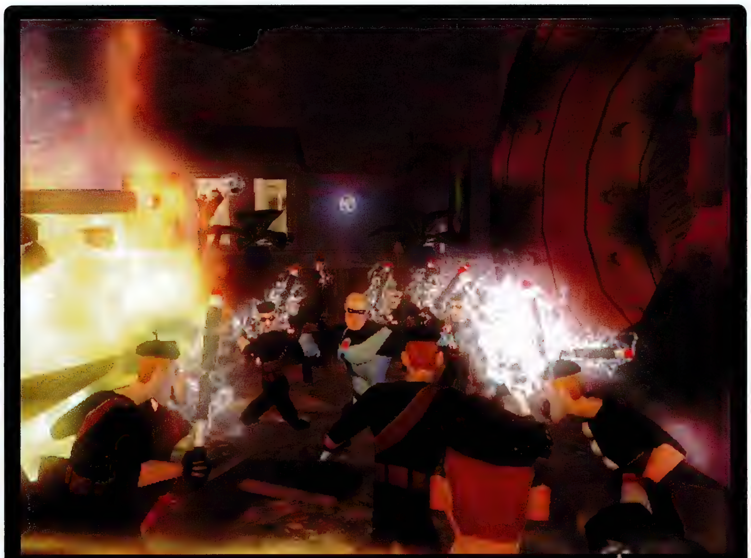
Konami has done some of their best work of the year on the Shaman King franchise, and rightly so given how cool a toon Shonen Jump's lighthearted spiritual soap is. Only the initiated dare apply, but for what it is, it's nicely polished. The action takes place in a series of real-time action/simulation matches that fall in on the complex/cumbersome side at first, but once mastered, it becomes quite quixotic, and the characters throughout are simply priceless. The real power exists between duels within the game's ingenious conversation screens—an area Konami has excelled at since the days of Policenauts. SK's not for everyone, but fans should be beside themselves. The time is now for a new Policenauts. Dave Halverson



Mario Power Tennis

System: GameCube	**Online:** None
Developer: Camelot	**Available:** November
Publisher: Nintendo	**play Rating** ★★★☆

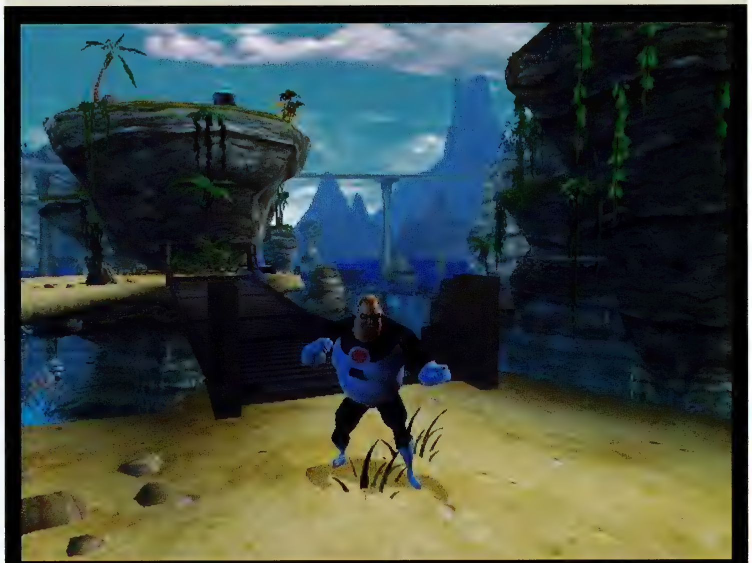
For a short time, I hated Mario Power Tennis. As an avid Nintendo and Camelot fan, I couldn't believe that I didn't like it. Instead of delivering a more or less straight game of tennis as the N64 Mario Tennis did, Mario Power Tennis throws in super moves, which can instantly transport you to the ball or land a devasting power shot. Each character has a unique set of moves, and while playing against the computer, these moves were driving me mental. No matter how well I made a shot, here came a super move to cancel out all that effort. Also, stopping for the super move animation became annoying. However, once I played Mario Power Tennis against a human, things improved greatly. Obviously the point of including the super moves was to impart a sense of Mario Kart-style cheapness to the action, and in a multiplayer context it works. I'm sure I would have had just as much fun had the super moves not been there, and I wish there was an option to turn them off, but I can appreciate the desire on Camelot's part to do something different. In all other respects, this is exactly the game you would expect, meaning it's impeccably made and full of Nintendo-land cheer. Michael Hobbs



The Incredibles

System: PlayStation 2	**Online:** None
Developer: Heavy Iron	**Available:** November
Publisher: THQ	**play Rating** ★★★☆

The Incredibles follows the movie storyline and then some, giving you the ability to flesh out some of the film's more memorable sequences, like dismantling the giant robot with Mr. Incredible. The graphics look great and feel slick, thanks to Heavy Iron's considerable skill with toon-based material, allowing for some excellent recreations of scenes from the movie. Add some nifty bonus material like conceptual art and clips from the film, and you have a game that's equally as contagious as the movie, whether you're 14 or 40. The inability to invert the camera rotation is a definite oversight (hard to acclimate if you're used to a certain configuration), but given the overall quality elsewhere, it's well worth switching gears, maybe just this once. Ashley Esqueda



> "...some excellent recreations of scenes from the movie."

I'm looking for a Japanese Girlfriend. Our most popular wacky Japanese T-shirt ever, it reaches out to all Japanese females who see it with a bizarre, fun message. It could be the start of a beautiful relationship! All shirts are 100% cotton 6.1 lb weight.

I Love ... Shirts. Show your devotion to Japan's unique popular culture with these fun and stylish kanji T-shirts. I Love Hentai, and I Love Yaoi — get your message across and show everyone what you love! Great for all Otaku!

Character T-shirts. Embrace Japan's culture of cuteness with our original Domo-kun and other T-shirts, a great way to let the world know that you love Japan and aren't afraid to show it. *Kawaii!* All shirts are printed in the USA and

Shirts for girls, Hoodies. Girls want to wear our wacky J-List T-shirts, too, so we make some great ones available. Also, look for warm Hoodie versions of some of our most popular designs, great for the cooler months.

H
WARNING RATED "H"

Rated H. In Japanese, the letter H (ecchi) is used to represent anything naughty. Here's a wacky Japanese "rated H" T-shirt for anyone who likes sex just a little too much. We're sure you can think of someone who needs one!

Completely Confident in my Sexual Prowess. For those who want to strut their stuff, we recommend this wacky T-shirt. Pronounced *Zetsurin Power*, with this shirt on, there's no telling what will happen.

MY NEIGHBOR TOTORO 2005
MARIO WORLD ×00 TIME
000100 1-2 353
WELCOME TO WARP ZONE!
BLACK BLACK

J-List is a special place where you can find over 2000 rare and unique products from Japan, including some you didn't even know existed. Visit us now!

J-List T-shirts are copyright © J-List Co. Ltd. Individual trademarks and copyrights for other products belong to their respective copyright holders.

www.jlist.com
(All products, including items for adults, must be 18)

www.jbox.com
(anime, toy, snack and other products)

No time like the present...to get into the past.

Get your back issues while supplies last.

play
VOODOO VINCE
Brute Force
P.N.03
E3 2003
20 pages of Castlevania
Baldur's Gate
Viewtiful Joe
NINJA GAIDEN
Advent Rising
Maximo
StarCraft Ghost
2003
Gran Turismo 4
Sudeki

Call today! 818-707-7786 ext. 106

$7.99 each (includes) shipping and handling (U.S. orders only)

Please allow 2-4 weeks for delivery.

Review

World of Warcraft

The finest fantasy-themed MMO available

Recommended system specs	
OS: Win ME/2K/XP	Video: Dx 9.0c, 64 MB T&L
CPU: 1.5GHz	Sound: Dx compatible
Mem: 512 MB	Internet: Broadband

Blizzard doesn't revolutionize a particular genre so much as polish and refine it to near-perfection. Diablo and its sequel brought a new level of intensity to the action-RPG. Starcraft and the first two installments of Warcraft introduced us to Blizzard's RTS mastery. And if you haven't played Warcraft 3—witnessed its gorgeous CG, excellent hero-driven story and intuitive gameplay—you've denied yourself an essential strategy-RPG experience. Enter World of Warcraft, Blizzard's take on the massively multiplayer genre. Despite failing to ship with every intended feature (to be added later in a free download), WoW welcomes gamers into one of the most endearing and involving online worlds the genre has ever known.

Screenshots can't do justice to World of Warcraft's great engine. Though most objects are low on polygonal complexity, the sense of cohesive overall world design on display here is phenomenal. Bear in mind that unless you teleport, take a boat between continents or enter an instanced zone, transitioning between huge regions is absolutely seamless. The positive effect that this has on immersion in an RPG cannot be overstated. Bolstered by strong artistic composition and great variations in terrain and altitude, the geography of this vibrant world is amazing. Blizzard's artists have also employed subtle lighting and colored haze to heighten the ambiance, while a pervasive specular gleam plays across the landscape, accentuating textures in accordance with the path of the sun and moon. Seeing it all in motion at a cool 60fps, alongside superb character animation, can be an enthralling experience.

Thanks to this superb world design, Blizzard has created thousands of quests that emphasize discovery and lore. Similar to EQ2, WoW's quest interface uses a journal log to track tasks on a per-region basis. You'll still be running through solo-friendly collection and slaughter quests, but there are loads of unique objectives leading to progressively tougher follow-ups that encourage teamwork and a thorough exploration of each region. The quest narrative is well-written and descriptive, often with a twinge of the wry humor that Blizzard is known for, and upon completion you'll be rewarded with meaningful sums of experience and occasionally a specific item or two of your choosing. There are so many quests available, you'll never feel obliged to grind out levels killing random creatures—though ample opportunity exists to do so, complete with appropriate random treasures.

World of Warcraft streamlines many previously tedious genre standards. A typical death involves a simple run to your corpse in ghost form and a minor durability hit to your gear (easily repaired). There is no experience point loss. Item crafting is actually fun as you partake in active gameplay such as gathering ore from mineral veins out in the wilds or fishing from a seaside pier—complete with

> "...one of the most endearing and involving online worlds the genre has ever known."

visible pole, line and bobber. The PvP system is given proper consideration: A full honor and reward system gives combat between the Alliance and Horde real meaning while elegantly deterring cheesy kills. And although there is a clear distinction between PvP and PvE servers, both incorporate "Battlegrounds"—highly designed instanced regions with intricate quests and combat between factions.

WoW focuses on nine fairly versatile character classes across the Alliance and Horde sides. There's an archetype for any play-style. The Hunter can tame all sorts of beasts, then name, feed and train them. The Mage teleports, blasts offensive spells and helps to manage large crowds with his polymorph spell. Priests are the master healers, Paladins can take a beating while boosting their party with holy effects, and the Warlock has a strong pet and devastating damage-over-time spells. The Shaman, limited to the Horde, commands powerful totems, while the Druid can shape change and provide support healing. Rogues are heavy damage dealers with nasty backstabs and stealthy invisibility. The cornerstone of any major fight is the Warrior, equipped with multi-purpose stances and the ability to pull enemies away from weaker party members. Many classes have supplementary crowd control, healing and stat-increasing skills and spells, and a full selection of talents allows for elaborate character customization. Downtime is minimized through regenerating food, drink and potions. All told, it makes for fast and exciting combat and very productive sessions.

World of Warcraft is an excellent RPG. It ships with a good user interface, but a freely available third-party UI (Cosmos) is a must-have addition. The ambient sounds and incidental music are first-rate and the CG intro is stunning. Despite the absence of key features at launch like a dynamic weather system and the proposed high-level "Hero Class" customization, World of Warcraft squeaks by EQ2 to claim the fantasy-themed throne in the genre. There's just so much unique personality here, such a keen grasp of quality and intuitive design, and such potential for extended gameplay options for advanced characters…if you've avoided online RPGs up to this point, it's time to investigate. And thus, Blizzard's hot streak continues.

Mike Griffin

World of Warcraft

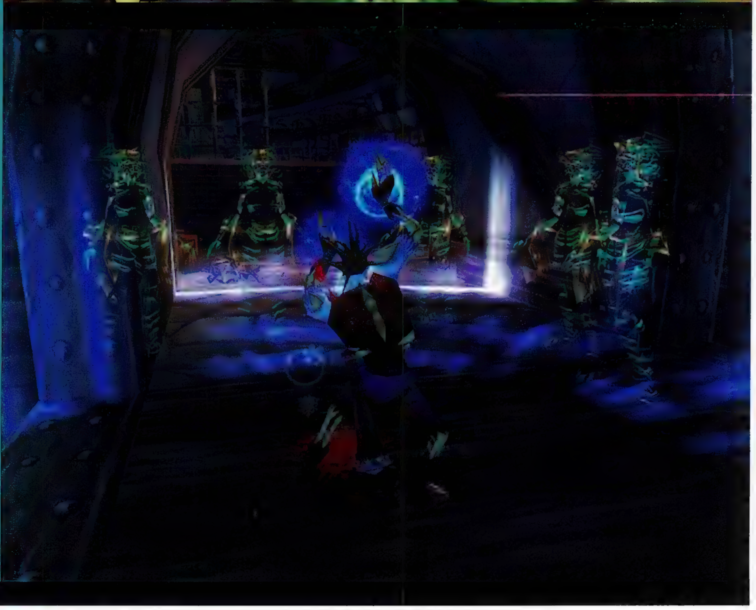
➕ Fantastic world design and tons of great content for solo and group play. Good class variety.

➖ Some key features were missing at launch. Third-party UI is superior to the stock interface.

Developer: Blizzard Entertainment
Publisher: VU Games
Online: Massively Multiplayer
Available: November

play Rating ★★★½

A hippogryph flies low past the ruins of Blackfathom Deep.



Raiding Party

It won't take experienced players long to raise their characters to the level cap, as Blizzard designed the journey to be less trying than most MMOs. We queried World of Warcraft producer Shane Dabiri about Blizzard's plans for the high-level game…

Interview

Shane Dabiri, producer World of Warcraft

play: MMO vets will attain the level cap pretty early on and start looking for challenging content. Are you investing significant resources into raid creation?

Shane Dabiri: We are very aware that MMO vets look forward to high-end content, including raids. Many of our designers are themselves veterans of other MMOs and consider raids to be a very important part of gameplay. At the outset, we have significant raiding in the game, with Onyxia, Ragnaros and several of Ragnaros' lieutenants. These raid bosses are very difficult encounters that really can only be defeated with a full raid group of around 40 players. Moreover, the dungeons where these raid bosses exist aren't just barren holding pens; there are lots of other raid-strength monsters in these boss's lairs to provide many new encounters for players who are already level-capped and are looking for the next great challenge. We plan to add many more raid encounters and raid dungeons.

How will Blizzard motivate both hardcore and casual players to try their hand at raiding?

Shane: We know that some hardcore MMO players will rush to our raid content because it's there and because it poses a great challenge. We also know that casual players might not be inclined to raid, at least initially. So for them, we are making raiding less intimidating. You will have quests to direct you to raiding, as well as great loot and fun encounters. Many of our raids are also instances, which will avoid the waiting in line that has plagued raiding in other games. And, we are building in some raid content that benefits everybody once defeated. For example, there will be a raid boss that guards an off-limits raid zone, and once the boss is defeated, everyone will have access to the zone, not just the winning raid group. We think casual players will then come to the new zone to check it out and find a lot of cool new quests and raid monsters, and thus get introduced to raiding.

Preview

F.E.A.R.

First-person action-movie spectacle

With two huge projects running concurrently, each one powered by massive self-contained teams, Monolith is one of the busiest developers on the planet. One team is wrapping up The Matrix Online for its early 2005 release, while the other—stacked with No One Lives Forever and Tron 2.0 vets—is knee-deep in the production of an original IP action blockbuster on behalf of VU Games. With F.E.A.R. (First Encounter Assault and Recon), the team aims to revolutionize close-quarters first-person action. Monolith is attempting to push more shading tricks, more world physics and more spectacular melee and armed combat than any previous FPS. Not content with simply raising the bar on these new genre standards, the team is also crafting a most extraordinary story deeply entrenched in the paranormal.

VU and Monolith are carefully guarding the game's intricate campaign plotline, woven in the fabric of a *Matrix*-meets-*The Ring* hybrid with stylized action, shocking twists and a sinister edge. After a rogue military force infiltrates a multi-billion dollar aerospace complex, officials within the compound open a distress line to the government. Special Forces are called in to resolve the incident using standard anti-terrorism protocols. As the operatives move in, some type of bizarre signal interference plays across their radio channels—completely severing communications. As the disconcerting din fades away, it becomes clear to headquarters that the entire squad has been slaughtered. This is where you come in: As a member of a classified strike force, you must take out the intruders and discover the origin of the signal. You've been trained and equipped to contain any threat…even one that defies rational thought.

F.E.A.R.

Point of Interest

It's loaded with Hong Kong action flair and incredible ballistics, but a disturbing paranormal theme haunts F.E.A.R.'s cinematic campaign.

Developer: Monolith Productions
Publisher: VU Games
Online: Deathmatch, Elimination
Available: Q2 2005

"…a most extraordinary story deeply entrenched in the paranormal."

Interview

Craig Hubbard, lead game designer
John O'Rorke, engine architect
Brad Pendleton, lead engineer

play: Why did Monolith decide to go with an original supernatural-themed shooter this time around, as opposed to something more conventional or licensed?

Craig Hubbard: Well, I think most developers would jump at the chance to work on original titles these days. The industry has grown so risk-averse that it's a rare and precious thing to get to develop new IP. We feel incredibly lucky to have the opportunity. As for the premise, we were attracted to military themes from the start, but we didn't want to do a conventional paramilitary thriller ripped from tomorrow's headlines. We decided to give it a more Hong Kong cinema spin, with insane firefights, over-the-top special effects and player-controlled slow-mo sequences. As the project evolved and the tech fell into place, the supernatural elements crept in naturally. I'm kind of obsessed with Asian horror films, so that was a big influence. I think it definitely helps set us apart: People have seen zombies and monsters in games before, but nobody has really done ghosts in a realistic, modern-day setting.

What is your primary goal, from a design standpoint, with F.E.A.R.'s single player campaign?

Hubbard: The emphasis is on immersion—immersion in the combat, the atmosphere, the environments, the moment-to-moment gameplay and the overall narrative experience. We decided that rather than coming up with a protagonist for you to play, we'd leave the details to your imagination. No name, face, voice, ethnicity or explicit background information. That way, when the bullets are whizzing by, when a shadow moves in the corner of your eye, when a squad of highly trained enemy soldiers comes flooding into the room, it's you and not some proxy in the thick of it. And it's you who gets to do what no one else is capable of.

Will the game feature real-life military weaponry or all-original weapon types?

Hubbard: A mixture of both. We're aiming for plausibility, but we wanted each weapon to have a very distinct function and feel, so we've taken some liberties in the interest of fun. The weapons are all rooted in reality, but in some cases branch out into the speculative realm.

This is an all-new Dx9 engine. What are some of its strongest features, and how are they beneficial to F.E.A.R.'s design style?

John O'Rorke: The technology behind the rendering and physics was developed by examining what type of game we really wanted to make and figuring out what would be necessary to accomplish that. We wanted to recreate an action movie **experience** and critical to achieving this goal is a feeling of a dynamic and reactive environment. Therefore we set out to allow lighting that could change with the environment, allow for realistic physics on objects to make the destruction more believable, and to allow lots of complex effects to be on screen at once. To this end, we created an entirely new physics system built upon technology from Havok and a renderer built around the concepts of materials, shaders and meshes. The advantages of the new physics are mainly that objects now behave like you would expect them to: boxes float **on water,** enemies get thrown around like stuntmen in combat and supports for shelves can be destroyed, causing their contents to topple. The primary advantage of the new renderer is that since it only uses meshes, shaders and materials, it is incredibly simple to extend without having to touch the renderer code. New techniques for rendering can be added through the shaders, which are simple text files, allowing for effects such as screen distortions or blurring, and new effects such as particle systems can be added through meshes. These resources all play nice together as well, which, **for example,** would allow **us** to build upon those systems **to** create particles that **cause** unique deformation and so on. This gives **us the** flexibility to create effects that **pull** people into the action movie spectacle.

> "As the project evolved...the super-natural elements crept in naturally."
>
> Craig Hubbard, lead game designer

Multiplayer shooters are bigger than ever. Do you have any tentative MP goals for F.E.A.R.?

Brad Pendleton: Definitely! The game will release with Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch, Elimination and Team Elimination. We are also experimenting with how to incorporate slow motion into multiplayer, and we have some very exciting ideas in that area. Finally, teamwork is a very important part of the team modes of F.E.A.R. We have several advanced tools for players to work closely with their team. For example, pre-set radio commands can place navigation markers in the world to quickly reorganize squad positions. Also, some events will automatically send out messages, like "grenade out" and other hands-free notices to alert team members.

We'll be keeping a very close eye on F.E.A.R. as it continues to make progress in the months to come. Given the developer's pedigree and VU's considerable production resources, this could be one of 2005's finest efforts.

Bystanders driven to madness and murder by a fiendish power...

Review

EverQuest 2

The future of Norrath is in good hands

Recommended system specs

OS: Win 2K/XP	Video: 128 MB Dx 9, Pixel Shader
CPU: 2GHz+	Sound: Dx compatible
Mem: 1 GB	Internet: Broadband

Let's put this genre into perspective for a moment: If you work or go to school full-time, there's simply no room for more than one MMORPG in your life. That is, if you hope to make significant progress *and* also enjoy a healthy dose of "normal" games, movies…or food and sleep. With this in mind, SoE's EverQuest 2 is certainly one of the top choices this season if you're looking to jump into a persistent online world.

EverQuest 2 excels as a beginner-friendly MMORPG and it makes a strong first impression. Between the extensive character-creation options, voice-over tutorial, a basic quest introduction and creatures clearly labeled as solo or group encounters, the initial experience may come off as somewhat coddling to genre veterans, but it's extremely accessible to neophytes. With the shock value of MMO exposure absorbed and carefully distributed across the first 10 levels, players will have their own private apartment room, bank account and a modicum of equipment before leaving the city and suburbs for the wilds of Norrath.

Captivating sights in EQ 2, like stunning water shaders and complex character models, reveal one of the most sophisticated MMO engines. The lighting and spell effects are among the best in the genre, and each environment—though a tad drab in terms of color and layout—enjoys sprawling draw distance. This engine is in dire need of additional optimization, however. A machine that is well above recommended spec will struggle to produce consistently smooth frame rates at high image quality settings—especially in busy towns. While SoE has made it clear that EQ 2's graphics were designed with future hardware in mind, the image quality isn't quite so mind-blowing as to justify such monster PC requirements for silky performance. Nonetheless, this is next-generation stuff, and combined with the Prague Symphony orchestral score, it's a solid presentation that conveys a good sense of epic high-fantasy ambiance.

> "…a solid presentation that conveys a good sense of epic high-fantasy ambiance."

EverQuest 2 has hundreds of rewarding quests doled out by an army of NPCs with spoken dialogue. The interface and quest journal are quite functional, and having quest items not consume inventory space is a great idea. Regarding all that voice over, it isn't quite the revelation it should be: Some of the NPC dialogue sounds painfully script-read, with botched emphasis and contrived inflections. Other times the voice talent hams it up with over-acted deliveries that wouldn't be out of place in a touring "medieval times" theatre troupe. And although the NPCs have some interesting AI (such as guards saluting passing superiors), it's a little bizarre when a roaming NPC twists its head in your direction, blurts out a quest offer without even stopping, and walks away—head snapping back into place. Granted, it catches your attention and opens up quest options, but the interaction itself looks oddly unnatural.

EQ 2 does a fine job executing its combat and multi-class grouping dynamics. Spells and skills are well balanced and encourage constant attentiveness. You won't be toggling the auto-attack and fetching a snack in this MMO. The class archetypes and subclasses allow for a pretty flexible party mélange—up until the mid-level game, at least—and FFXI-style skill chains will unleash some devastating attacks if everyone is paying attention. In a bold move, EQ 2 penalizes the entire group with experience debt whenever a single member dies. Theoretically this should encourage better play, but it often becomes a point of frustration when a group falls on hard luck.

EverQuest 2 isn't the genre revolution it was hyped to be, but it is one of the better MMO titles available. Loads of quest content, impressive technical achievements and great group combat will keep you coming back for more. Some dull environments and lame voice over, as well as steep hardware requirements, might chase you away to…whiter pastures. Mike Griffin

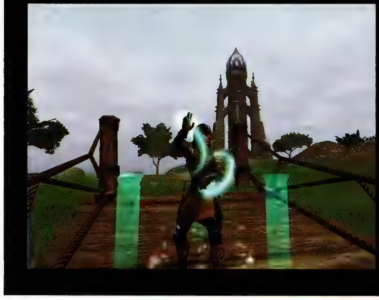
EverQuest 2

+ Most of the presentation is quite impressive. Fun, active group gameplay.

− Weak bits of voice and odd animation; some bland regions. Very hungry engine.

Developer: Sony Online Entertainment
Publisher: Sony Online Entertainment
Online: Massively Multiplayer
Available: November

play Rating ★★★☆

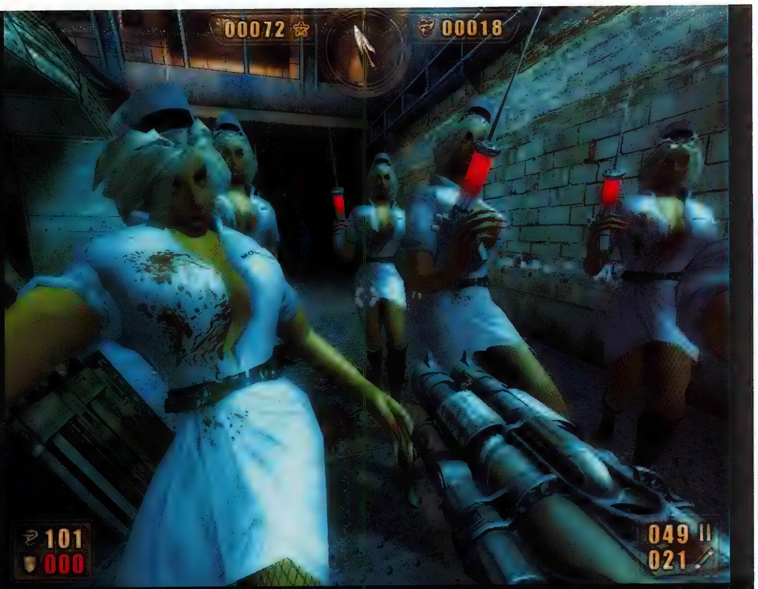


Review

Painkiller:
Battle Out of Hell

Satan's lieutenant pulls you back into the fray

Recommended system specs	
OS: Win XP	Video: Dx 9.0 128 MB
CPU: 2.4 GHz	Sound: Dx 8.1+
Mem: 512 MB	Internet: Broadband



With Painkiller: Battle Out of Hell, People Can Fly once again demonstrates why it is a rising star in the industry. This low-priced expansion pack for one of 2004's top shooters delivers a solid 10-level package rife with impressive demonic hordes, killer new weapons like the sniper stake gun, expanded multiplayer (Capture the Flag, finally) and an updated PAIN engine. Unfortunately, it also features abominable CG cinemas with a mutant David Hasselhoff clone in the role of protagonist Daniel Garner.

The tweaked engine and ubiquitous Havok physics put on a great action show in Battle Out of Hell. Soft lighting effects look fantastic and new water shaders are impressive, though a bit distortion-heavy. PCF has also created a gorgeous fire effect and added new airborne particles and explosive debris. The environments are up to the caliber of the first game, with standout designs like the Big Pit's massive vertical depth and the powerful atmospheres of the Apocalyptic City and Leningrad levels. Enemy designs and animation take center stage in BooH's presentation. From homicidal nurses with virus-filled needles to giant mechanized spiders and musket-wielding skeletal pirates, every bad guy you face is high-poly, detailed and extremely well animated. They also expire in a very satisfying manner, whether popping into gory bits and exploding in a crimson shower, slowly scorching to their knees in a flamethrower pyre, or hanging limply from a wall—mercilessly pinned-up by a volley of wooden stakes. The epic final encounter with Allastor could practically warrant the purchase of the expansion on its own; it just looks *that* good. Bear in mind that all this sweet eye candy thirsts for a little more hardware horsepower than the first game.

> "...a solid 10-level package rife with impressive demonic hordes..."

Battle Out of Hell employs more set piece encounters to drive its gameplay than the original, and the enforced pacing works out rather well. Two levels actually include on-rails sections, and the camera tracking here is excellent, especially during the vertigo-inducing rollercoaster ride that caps off the Loony Park level. PCF has also included plenty of outrageous swarming enemy sequences guaranteed to coax an approving grin from any shooter fan. Within this bastion of creature carnage, Battle Out of Hell contains a few interesting puzzle-oriented boss fights and ample opportunity to brandish many cool Tarot Card powers. You don't get this particular brand of manic action in Half-Life 2 or Doom 3, and in that regard Painkiller continues to fill a void.

DreamCatcher is probably the envy of many larger publishers—entities that covet DC's close affiliation with People Can Fly. For the next Painkiller, DreamCatcher needs to ramp it up a notch. While Battle Out of Hell is great fun and the real-time action looks and sounds terrific, the front end needs some work and the crude CG cinemas manage to blemish the game's overall sheen. The voice talent is good, so they need to get a powerful CG firm like Digital Frontier on the case or just go with in-engine cuts. Patch up these holes and an FPS masterpiece is the next logical step in Painkiller's ascension. Mike Griffin

Painkiller: Battle Out of Hell

+ More multiplayer, great action visuals and huge demonic crowds to mow down.

− CG cinemas are afflicted by poor models and animation, cheapening overall quality.

Developer: DreamCatcher
Publisher: People Can Fly
Online: Deathmatch, Capture the flag, more
Available: November

play Rating ★★★☆

Review

Vampire The Masquerade: Bloodlines

Great RPG soul trapped in mediocre action body

Recommended system specs

OS: Win 2K/XP	Video: Dx 9.0c 128 MB
CPU: 1.8 GHz	Sound: Dx 9.0
Mem: 512 MB	Internet: N/A

Vampire the Masquerade: Bloodlines isn't quite cooked. It certainly looks tantalizing, but some edges are still raw and unsavory. Had Troika's RPG spent another couple of months in production, we might be enjoying one of 2004's best adventure efforts. The core RPG elements are deep, fleshed-out and loaded with several viable abilities to navigate the labyrinthine game of politics and brutality in LA's undead scene. Among many roles, you might become the seductress, weaving hypnotic wordplay to coerce others, a rude brawler with enormous constitution to back-up your arrogant swagger, or an ace hacker and security expert skulking in shadows, dismantling objectives from the inside out. The writing and spoken dialogue are top notch and often wickedly humorous, and the tale of rising armageddon interwoven with each clan's place in Kindred history and society is well crafted.

The Source engine captures all of this nocturnal intrigue with a strong presentation of rich urban details and excellent, expressive character models boasting pretty good lip sync and plenty of fine female bounce. Ironically, however, the developers had issues here manipulating some of Source's stronger elements, as we witness bizarre cloth simulation glitches and occasionally spastic NPC pathing. The wounds are further compounded by bits of nasty collision and sloppy physics: You'll get stuck on doors, corpses, planks of wood and other seemingly innocuous objects—and it happens *way* too often. Superficially, the Half-Life 2 engine looks good in VTMB, but the execution is pretty half-baked.

A fine RPG core and ostensibly solid presentation are nearly drawn lifeless by the clunky, uninspiring action system. Clearly it was difficult to merge dozens of stats with twitch melee and gunplay, but that doesn't justify the lapse of design resolve with regards to the game's limited move selection, dubious hit detection and lacking AI.

Despite the encumbrance of a number of rough spots, Vampire the Masquerade: Bloodlines still rises to the occasion as an atmospheric, mature and engaging story-driven adventure. It pulls you along with unwavering RPG depth through the mire of unfortunate execution blunders and it succeeds, despite itself. Mike Griffin

Vampire The Masquerade: Bloodlines

+ Excellent story and character depth coupled with superb voice work.

− Underwhelming combat and some problematic collision and physics.

Developer: Activision
Publisher: Troika Games
Online: None
Available: November

play Rating ★★★★

Review

Sonic Heroes

Better graphics sweeten the deal

Recommended system specs

OS: Win 98SE/ME/2K/XP	Video: Dx compatible, 64 MB
CPU: 1.4GHz+	Sound: Dx compatible
Mem: 256 MB	Internet: N/A

The PC version of Sonic Heroes is essentially an Xbox port with improved graphics. The tutorial even mentions the controller. Thankfully, configuring your favorite PC pad couldn't be simpler in the options. We actually played through the game using an official Sony DualShock 2 controller with a third-party adapter that supports vibration options. It worked like a charm. Incidentally, you *need* one of these; it makes all the difference in games like Sonic and Prince of Persia. The additional graphics options allow you to crank up anisotropic filtering (that's better than trilinear), play at very high resolutions and enable a toggle to lock the frame rate. To re-cap: fully compatible PS2 pad in hand, 1024 x 768 resolution and unshakeable 60fps graphics. Toss in fast loading, and you have a great Sonic Heroes experience. The dynamic speed/power/flight team play remains fun, and though minor collision and camera issues still pop up and some voice work and textures are of dubious quality, the excellent Team Sonic, Dark and Chaotix campaigns provide ample reason to own this version. It's great to see further PC support from Sega. Bring on PSO: Blue Burst! Mike Griffin

Sonic Heroes

+ Team gameplay is still great and the new graphics options are a fine addition.

− Minor areas of flaky collision and camera. Some textures are too low-res.

Developer: Sonic Team
Publisher: Sega
Online: None
Available: November

play Rating ★★★★

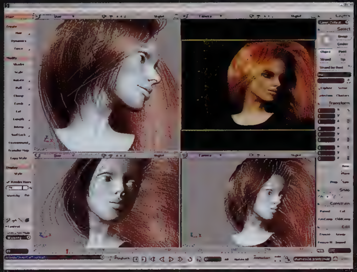
00004500
04:13:01
049
TEAM BLAST

00001200
01:11:88
021
1/10

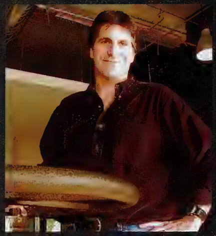
00005180
04:04:71
020
TEAM BLAST

XSI: Leading edge character animation

Ever wondered how Namco, Capcom and Konami animate their 3D characters? They assemble some of the industry's most incredible engines, but what drives the animation core of these engines—every strand of hair, flowing robe or buckling plate of armor? It's a little tool by the name of XSI from animation software leader SoftImage. Currently powering Metal Gear Solid 3, Prince of Persia: Warrior Within and Resident Evil 4, soon we'll be seeing XSI's newest v.4 implementation in Tekken 5 and Pandemic's Mercenaries. Through the suite's Custom Display Host, developers can access the heart of XSI and expose its animation functions to their own custom engines. According to Onimusha 3 producer Jun Takeushi, this allows "…an exceptionally high degree of tool integration." SoftImage is also taking a more consumer-friendly initiative with its involvement in the Half-Life 2 development kit and mod tools. A powerful XSI EXP-enhanced toolset will be freely available to help mod-makers squeeze the most from the engine using many of the same tools that Valve had at their disposal during development. It is SoftImage's belief that the dedicated modification teams of today are the mainstream game designers of tomorrow; XSI helps to ensure that even talented smaller teams can compete.



Valve wins cyber café court battle

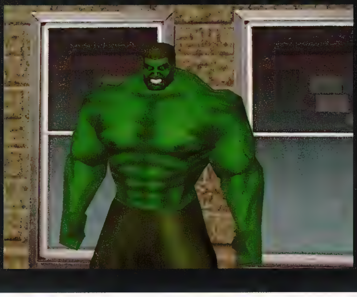


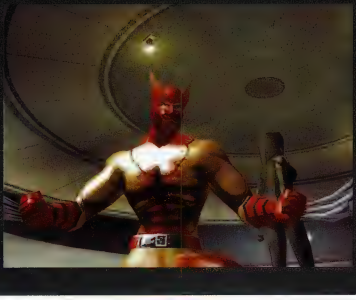
Bill Van Buren of Valve Software

Legal disputes between developers and publishers are never pretty. After two years of battling VU Games, Valve has prevailed in its bid to hold exclusive rights to the use of its products in cyber cafés. Valve's original complaint against Sierra (a Vivendi Universal brand) involved Sierra's placement of Valve games in cyber cafés. Valve claimed this activity was beyond the contractual limitations of Sierra's limited license, and in late November the U.S. Federal District Court ruled in agreement. The end result means Counter-Strike, Counter-Strike: Source, and Half-Life 2 are off-limits to VU Games in cyber cafés and Valve can enjoy unimpeded delivery via its Steam service.

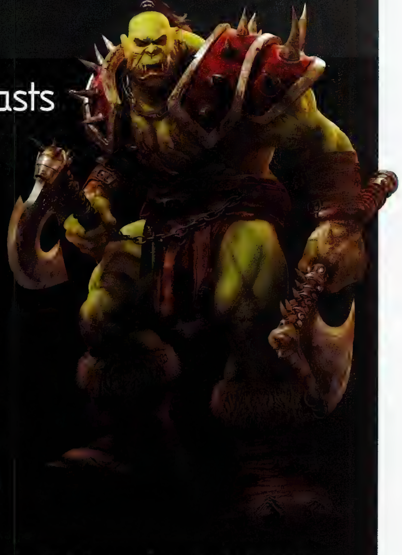
Marvel vs. City of Heroes

No, it isn't a Capcom-style dream match-up. This is the stuff of litigation nightmares. Ever since its fortunes reversed at the turn of the century thanks to highly lucrative movie licensing deals, Marvel's financial and legal departments have been on the prowl for ways to profit from the company's considerable stock of intellectual property. The latest target of this crusade appears to be NCsoft and Cryptic Studios. It is Marvel's contention that City of Heroes' character creation process allows for the design of several characters that closely resemble popular trademarked Marvel heroes. Two custom creations in particular are at the heart of this case: a Wolverine-style mutant scrapper and a scientifically engineered Hulk tanker. We put this allegation to the test, hands on, inside City of Heroes' character creation mode (see image below). Our Wolverine character didn't look very convincing, but the Hulk was a dead ringer. Of course, huge bare-chested green-skinned freaks aren't very difficult to design. If Marvel somehow wins this suit, it will be the first time a player-created in-game feature has infringed upon trademarks and it might be the genesis of an unfortunate trend that could stifle customization options in future titles.





Postscript



WoW Indeed: Blizzard boasts shocking first-day sales

While it can't match Halo 2's numbers, World of Warcraft soundly shattered all first-day records for MMOs with an estimated 250,000 copies sold and over 200,000 accounts created. During the first 24 hours of its service, World of Warcraft also welcomed over 100,000 concurrent users to its servers. Initially this impacted the performance of servers and players had to contend with slight latency and waiting times. However, within days of the game's release, Blizzard raised the quantity of North American servers to an astounding total of 88 and ironed out various technical issues. With sales expected to flourish well into 2005, World of Warcraft is on track to become one of the biggest games of the season. And it's not just a fixture on thousands of monitors across the planet: Tokyopop's new manga series, Warcraft: The Sunwell Trilogy, continues the beloved lore of the franchise. Artist Jae Hwan Kim (King of Hell comic) and author Richard Knaak (Warcraft novels) will preside.

Infogrames abandons Civilization

Although they recently enjoyed a certified hit with Roller Coaster Tycoon 3, Atari owner Infogrames continues to be plagued by underwhelming market performance. During such phases, it's not uncommon for publishers to trim the fat from their properties line-up to free up some quick gain. It seems that this is just what Infogrames had in mind. In an earnings report for the first half of their 2005 financial year, brief information details the sale of the Civilization franchise for a cool $22.3 million. The identity of the purchaser is unknown as we go to press, but Activision appears to be the favorite bet among several sources—though we wouldn't write off Microsoft or series developer Firaxis Games.

BioWare opens online store

Esteemed developer BioWare has opened its online shop for business. Among various goods and merchandise, BioWare is now offering downloads of new Neverwinter Nights modules. Each of the first three mods, Witch's Wake, ShadowGuard and Kingmaker, is a short, high-grade adventure with quality narrative, voice and polished visuals. BioWare's digital download model is very interesting. Kingmaker, the largest of the three, contains over 500 lines of voice across its eight-hour campaign and sells for $7.99. ShadowGuard can be downloaded for $4.99 and offers a tightly focused three-hour campaign. Witch's Wake comes bundled with ShadowGuard for free. Despite their diminutive size and low price, all three modules deliver premium gameplay as you'd expect from BioWare.

NPD PC Game Sales

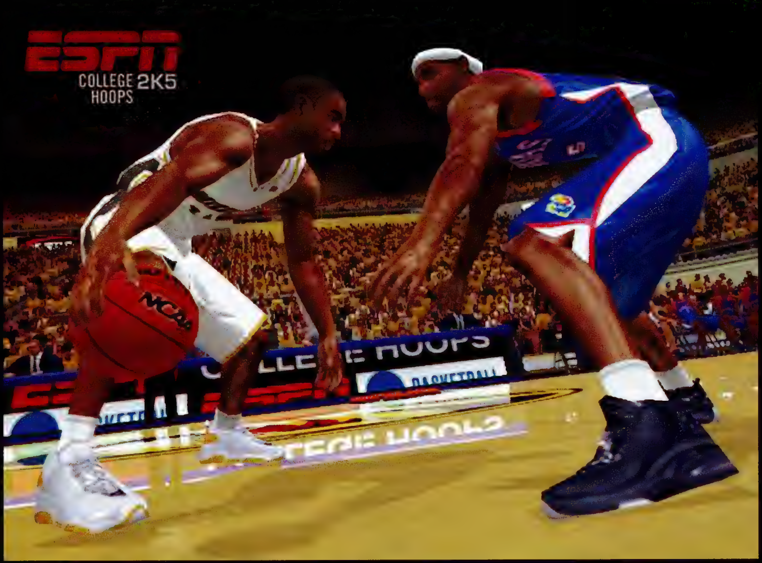
Week of November 7 - November 13

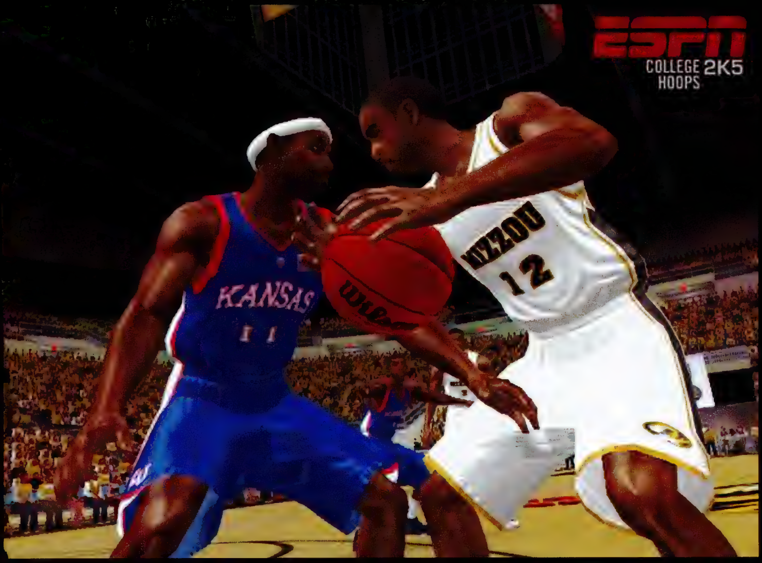
01. EverQuest 2 - Sony Online Entertainment
02. Roller Coaster Tycoon 3 - Atari
03. The Sims 2 - EA
04. The Sims 2 SE - EA
05. Rome: Total War - Activision
06. MS Zoo Tycoon 2 - Microsoft
07. Axis & Allies - Atari
08. The Sims Deluxe - EA
09. Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault - EA
10. Halo: Combat Evolved - Microsoft

ESPN College Hoops 2K5

Sega has once again beaten the mighty EA Sports

review





ESPN
COLLEGE 2K5
HOOPS

Sega is driving down the lane and no one is in their way.

Can anyone stop the Sega/ESPN machine? Their latest college hoops game is without question the best basketball game—pro or college—out there. From the beautiful graphics to the incredible Legacy Mode and the brilliant gameplay, this is what basketball games dream to be.

Any die-hard sports fan will tell you: nothing is more exciting than the college basketball game, especially during tournament season. From the rowdy crowds to the thumping college fight songs, the whole vibe is completely different than what goes on in the NBA. What impressed me most about College Hoops 2K5 was how it really delivers the atmosphere and excitement of college basketball. Not only do you have team-specific cheers, but you also get mascots, cheerleaders and all of their arenas. No other game comes as close to making you feel like you're there.

Jumping into the game is like poetry in motion, or more appropriately Iso-Motion.

Utilizing the NBA 2K5 engine, players will be able to execute fancy jukes, spins and fadeaway shots with just the push of a button. Stutter steps and the all-too-powerful hop step are in the game as well. The brilliant post-game from NBA 2K5 has been included in College Hoops—giving more options to players in the paint. Defense has also been tweaked to perfection. Whether you're pulling down boards or setting up zones and traps, it's all incredibly fluid and instinctive.

A nice new feature in 2K5 is the two-button pass. In addition to the normal pass—which throws the ball to the player closest to the basket—players now can instruct a player to head to the basket as you pass the ball. If timed perfectly, you can perform slamming dunks and beautiful lay-ups.

Gone is the Franchise Mode, and in its place is the fantastic Legacy Mode. Shifting its focus a little bit, the emphasis now is on the coach. Players will start off taking a coaching job at a small, no-name school; your challenge is to build a team that gets the attention of bigger schools. As you gain a reputation, you'll be able to hire better assistant coaches that can help with scouting and recruiting better players. Eventually, you could become the best coach in the country.

Presentation and visuals in College Hoops 2K5 are top notch. Using the NBA 2K5 engine was a smart move—not only are players incredibly detailed and nicely animated, the colors and textures are deep and rich. The mascots and cheerleaders are also a nice touch.

In addition, College Hoops 2K5 has online gameplay on both PS2 and Xbox. Even though the leader boards, stat-tracking and ranked matches are nice features, what impressed me most about the game was how smooth and fluid it was online. Gameplay was virtually lag-free and response time was so smooth, it rivaled any other sports game played online. Tom Ham

ESPN College Hoops 2K5

+ You can't get much better than this.

− How is Sega going to top this one?

System: PlayStation 2, Xbox
Developer: Visual Concepts
Publisher: Sega/Global Star
Online: Multiplayer, tournaments, leagues
Available: November

play Rating ★★★★

> "Not only do you have team-specific cheers, but you also get mascots, cheerleaders and all of their arenas."

ESPN
COLLEGE 2K5
HOOPS

ESPN
COLLEGE 2K5
HOOPS

ESPN
COLLEGE 2K5
HOOPS

NCAA March Madness 2005

EA is going in the right direction with this one **review**

Although EA's game lacks the spark and depth that Sega's College Hoops 2K5 provides, it's still a great game that deserves props for some pretty cool and innovative gameplay additions.

Fans of college basketball will no doubt spend a lot of time with College Classics. This mode recreates some of college basketball's most memorable games and moments. Remember Laettner's last-second overtime shot in the 1992 regional finals? Now imagine being able to sink that shot yourself. Or how about playing from Michigan in 1989? Or close games like UCLA and Missouri in 1992? It's all possible with College Classics.

My favorite addition is the Floor General. Everyone who follows college basketball knows the floor general refers to the point guard—the person in charge of putting a coach's gameplan into motion. Helping players do this is a brand-new play-calling system. We're all familiar with using the D-pad to call offensive and defensive plays, right? Now imagine being able to call these on the fly *and* being able to see the diagram of the play on the court as you're running it in real time. Icons show directions to dribble, where to pass and where to shoot. This allows for two things: First, players can learn how a play works, and second, using these diagrams allows you to become a better player—you could be lethal online. Not only can you learn how a play works, you can also learn how to exploit them as well.

EA Sports has revamped Dynasty Mode as well. Every aspect from recruiting to coaching to maintaining a respectable basketball program is covered here. Through the use of your PDA, you'll receive messages from your coaching staff about potential recruits, status of the team and if there is anything else you need to worry about. In a bold move by EA, you can now use somewhat underhanded tactics to get things done. Using family connections, giving away tickets to alumni, etc.—it definitely adds a little something to the mix.

Surprisingly, the sound is lacking in March Madness 2005, which is pretty uncharacteristic for an EA Sports game. Although the play-by-play commentary by Brad Nessler is pretty much spot-on with what is going on, ironically it's Dick Vitale's color commentary that can get pretty annoying. He manages to say the same stuff over and over again. Tom Ham

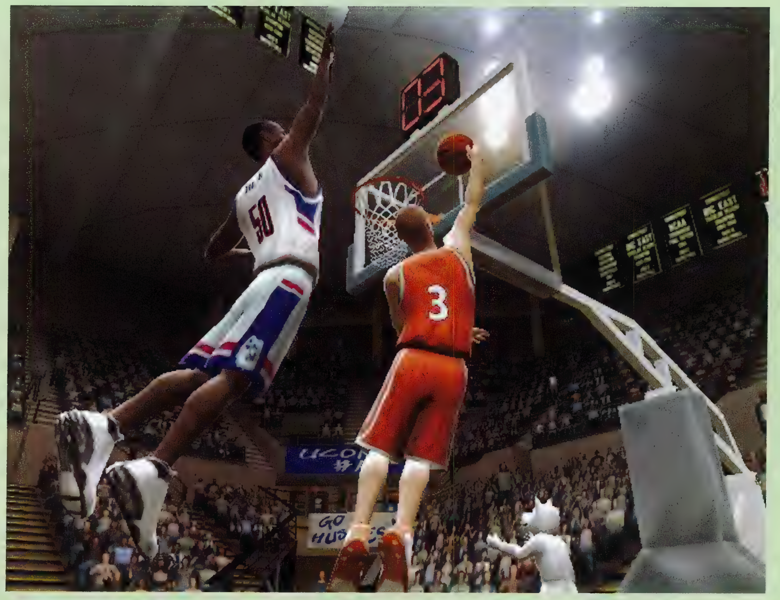
NCAA March Madness 2005

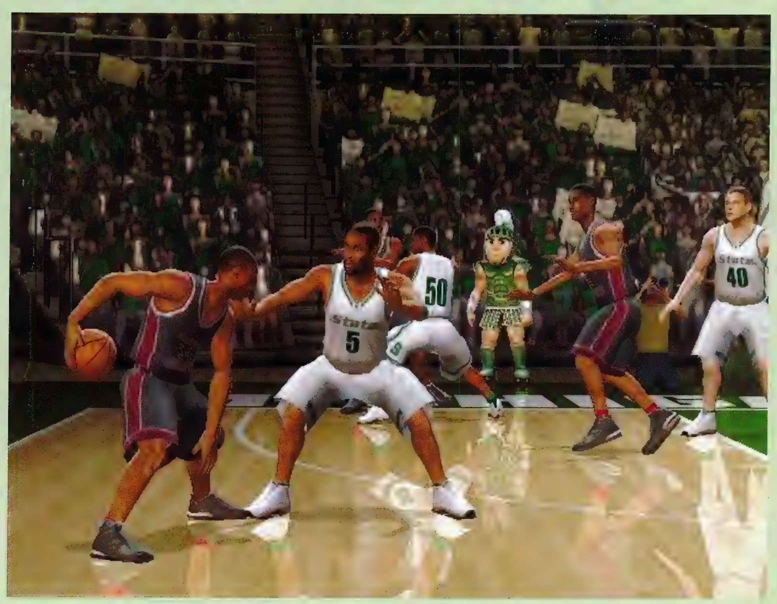
+ EA Sports continues to show signs of improvement with this title.

− Sega still has them beat.

System: PlayStation 2, Xbox
Developer: EA Canada
Publisher: EA
Online: Multiplayer, downloads, tournaments
Available: November

play Rating ★★★☆





The Floor General will make everyone a better player.

"...a great game that deserves props for some pretty cool and innovative gameplay additions."

Rumble Roses

Yes, there's a good game in here too

review

Rumble Roses is as shameless as it gets. Bouncy cleavage, fully exposed butt cheeks, gratuitous crotch shots…the developers of Rumble Roses know that they've created some of the most amazing, curvaceous character models ever—the most impressive I can think of on PS2—and they're not afraid to show it off. The female grapplers here make the WWE divas look like a bunch of mousy wallflowers.

Fortunately, beyond the titillating visuals, Rumble Roses also packs a punch in the gameplay department. There's a good, solid feel to the grappling and the brawling, along with a decent array of flashier-than-real-life moves. Yuke's fans will feel right at home with the controls, but the nuances of grapples and submissions clearly differentiate it from other efforts. Though the action is fast, actual character movement is a bit sluggish, and the counter system didn't seem as responsive as in other wrestling games, but these rarely detract from the experience.

Outside the graphics and gameplay fundamentals, however, Rumble Roses seems a bit naked. The trade-off for such high-poly models is the limitation of two characters in the ring, along with a pretty sad-looking crowd and some other aesthetic shortcuts—the fact that the sand is a non-interactive bitmap when the ladies are wrestling beachside just seems wrong. The story modes are also short (and rather silly), plus there are very few match types (just normal and mud matches) and no character customization, leaving this game without the long-term appeal that the best wrestling games have. Rumble Roses is gorgeous and fun, just not as deep as I'd like. Chris Hoffman

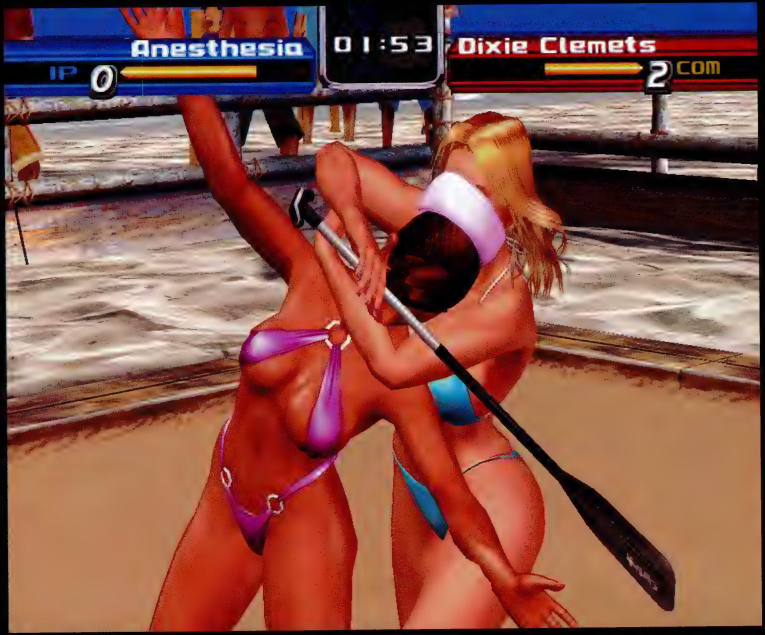
Rumble Roses

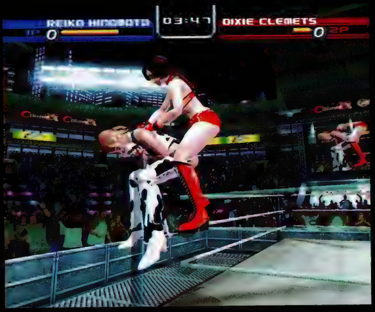
+ Astounding graphics, great wrestling action

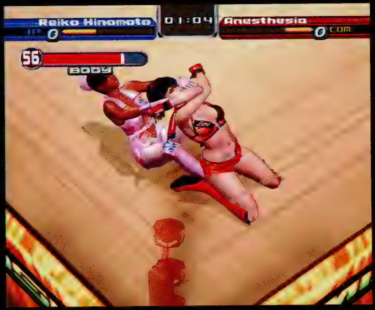
− Distinct lack of modes and options

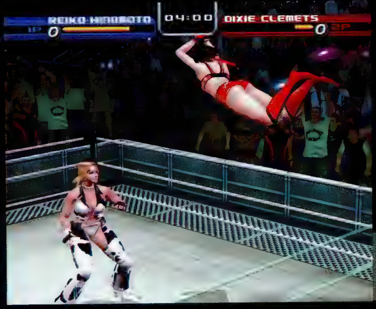
System: PlayStation 2
Developer: Yuke's/KCE Tokyo
Publisher: Konami
Online: None
Available: November

play Rating ★★★☆









"…beyond the titillating visuals, Rumble Roses also packs a punch in the gameplay department."

Reiko and Dixie engage in some hot girl-on-girl action.

Outlaw Tennis

Oh, this is gonna be good…

preview

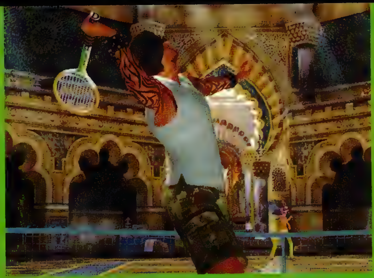
You knew it was only a matter of time before Global Star/Hypnotix spreads their debauchery into the luv-ly upper-crusty world of tennis. Aside from the quality sim attributes the series has become known for—which in this case include 16 (15 plus one surprise) fully customizable characters with developing levels of power, endurance, control, serves, accuracy and speed, six modes, 12 courts, match modes, four-player online and more—you'll be able to smack your bitches up real good, be a complete nuisance and drive your opponent wild fiddling with the new momentum system, which determines how fast your turbo gauge builds, which, of course, translates into a wicked assortment of power/signature shots. That ought to keep you off the net. Dave Halverson

Outlaw Tennis

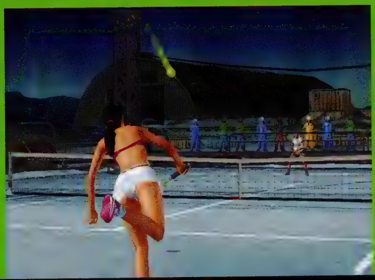
Point of Interest

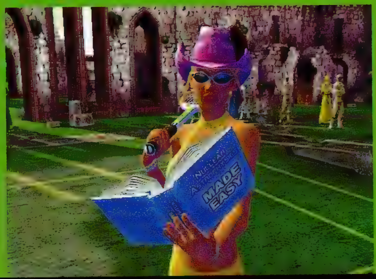
Apparently the 16th character in OT is quite the surprise. If it ends up being Kornikova, I say we march on GS headquarters…

System: PlayStation 2, Xbox
Developer: Hypnotix
Publisher: Global Star
Available: Spring 2005



"…you'll be able to smack your bitches up real good, be a complete nuisance and drive your opponent wild…"





Gretzky NHL 2005

989 Sports really needs inspiration **review**

With two great hockey titles already on the market, you simply gotta wonder why 989 Sports would even bother releasing a hockey game of their own this year—especially with the track record of their weak NHL Faceoff series. Sure, pulling the legendary Wayne Gretzky out of retirement and putting him on the box was a good idea, but sadly, even the greatest hockey player ever couldn't help 989 find its much-needed groove.

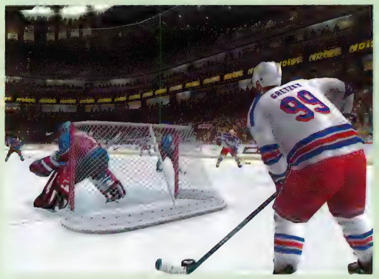
On the flipside, Gretzky NHL 2005 is far better than any previous installment of Faceoff—granted, that's not saying much—but it accounts for something. But what I did like about Gretzky was how the game played. Players can expect lots of hard hits, fast breakaways and lots of one-timers. Although the majority of the games were pretty high-scoring (which isn't very realistic), the frenetic gameplay was a nice change to the simulation pace of the current crop of hockey games.

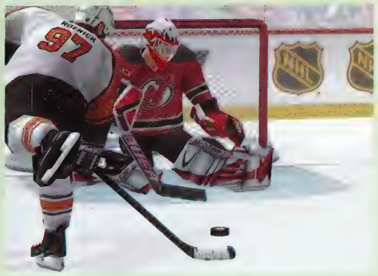
What Gretzky has going for it is that anyone can pick up a controller and jump right in. Every aspect of the game—from passing to shooting to checking—is done with one button. Although the game has advanced moves like give-and-go passing and deke moves, most players will probably stick to the rudimentary stuff.

A major shortcoming of Gretzky is the franchise mode. Considering 989 Sports had one of the best career modes in Shootout, you gotta wonder why it's so uninspiring here. There is nothing special going on here—you can perform trades, sign free agents and draft rookies—that's basically it. Sure, you can play through multiple seasons and manage your lines, but the things you've come to expect like negotiating contracts, salaries and coaching staff are noticeably absent here.

Gretzky's saving grace lies in the visuals. Although not up to par with ESPN NHL 2K5, this is the best-looking hockey game that 989 has published. Tom Ham

"...even the greatest hockey player ever couldn't help 989 find its much-needed groove."





Gretzky NHL 2005

+ This is the best hockey game that 989 Sports has ever published.

– But that's not saying much.

System: PlayStation 2

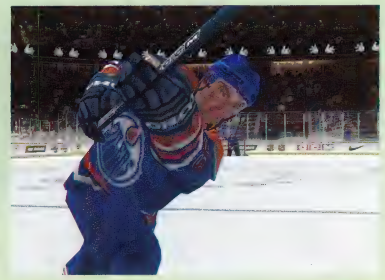
Developer: Page 44 Studios

Publisher: Sony/989 Sports

Online: Multiplayer, tournaments, downloads

Available: November

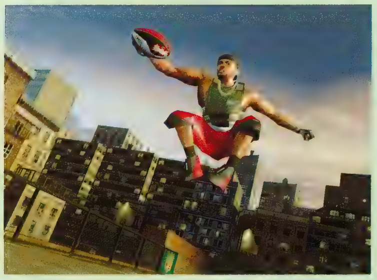
play Rating ★★★★

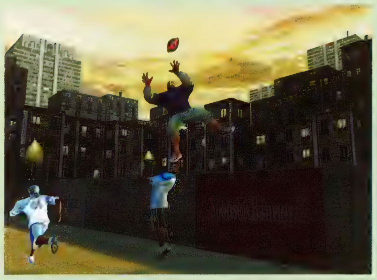


Sure, the players look nice, but the game is average at best.

NFL Street 2

If there ever was gang warfare in a sports game, this is it **preview**





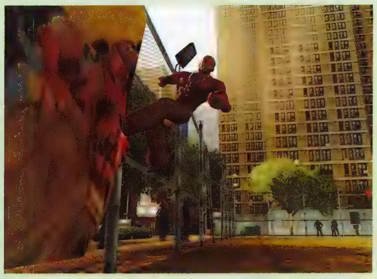
Over-the-top-jumps and running off walls mixed with football? Holla!

The original NFL Street changed the way we looked at arcade-style football. What was once owned by Midway and the well-respected NFL Blitz series, EA Sports Big has created a game that is tweaked and refined to its finest. Now a year after the initial release, it's time to play some more ball in NFL Street 2.

Street 2 improves upon an already solid formula. All of the hard hits, outrageous moves and, of course, GameBreakers are back, but this time around, more of an emphasis has been put on the actual playing fields, specifically the walls surrounding the fields. Where in the first game, players could tackle people into walls to cause fumbles, in Street 2, you can now climb, run and jump off of them during gameplay. Imagine jumping off the wall 15 feet in the air, all the while you're juking around other players and then going in for a TD. It's all rather poetic when you see it in motion.

Giving Street 2 a little more depth is a new story mode called Own the City. Here players will be able to create their own unique player using EA's new Create-A-Player creation system. Just as in Tiger Woods, the amount of customization is extraordinary. Everything from throwback jerseys to jewelry to shoes—remember, this is street-style, so it's all about style. Once your player is created, it's off to find some pick-up games and start building a reputation. The better you do, the more players will want to play with you. Soon you'll be taking over new neighborhoods and defending your own. And get this: if you manage to complete Own the City mode with your Mack Daddy player, you can import him to Madden NFL 2006. Pretty cool I must say.

Additional features include seven new game modes including Crush the Carrier and Jump Ball Battles, a new GameBreaker system, additional playing fields and online gameplay for both PS2 and Xbox. Tom Ham



NFL Street 2

Point of Interest

Wall running completely changes the landscape of the playing field. Spider-Man, eat your heart out.

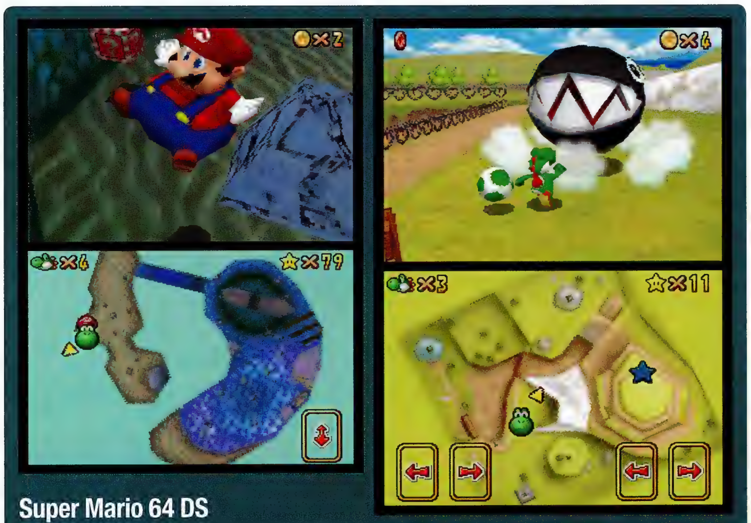
System: PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube

Developer: EA Sports

Publisher: EA

Available: March 2005

"Soon you'll be taking over new neighborhoods and defending your own."



Super Mario 64 DS

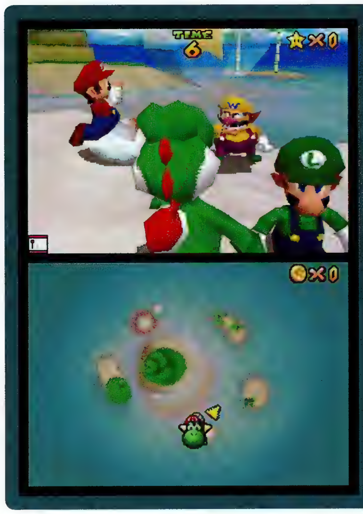
System: Nintendo DS	Multiplayer: 4-player single-cartridge
Developer: Nintendo	Available: November
Publisher: Nintendo	play Rating ★★★½

Quite a neat trick having a little handheld version of one of the first and best 3D platformers ever made. Super Mario 64 DS is far from a straight conversion of the N64 classic, however, as it offers quite a wealth of additions.

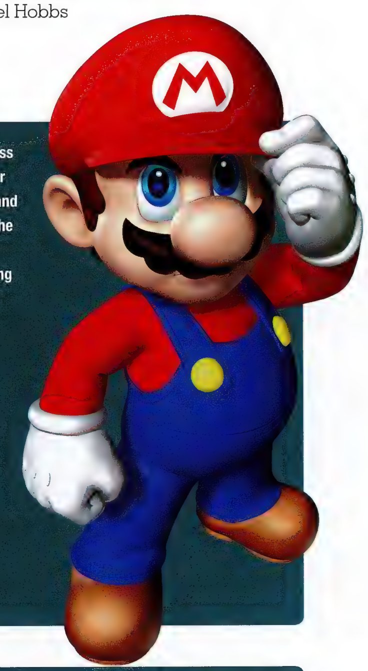
First and foremost, it's on the DS, which means you have an extra screen and the touchpad to play around with. Here, the bottom screen is used predominantly as a map during the adventure mode, and it also serves as the control surface for the stylus control mode, which is, I think, the best way to play the game. It takes some getting used to, and you'll never be quite as smooth with a pen as you would a traditional stick in a game like this, but it beats the control pad hands down. Where the bottom screen really comes into effect is in the playing of the unlockable mini games. Most of these make very clever use of the dual screens and stylus input—a great diversion. Being on DS also means wireless gameplay, and Mario 64 DS includes a very fun single-cartridge multiplayer mode where players dash around tiny areas trying to steal stars from one another.

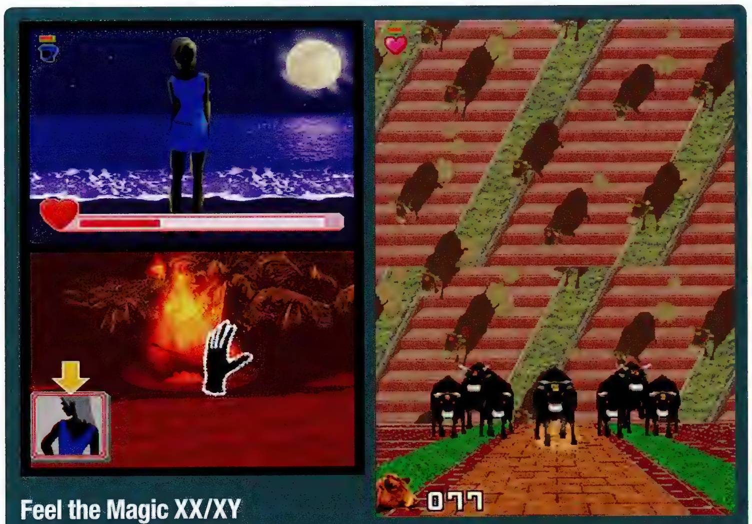
The biggest change to the game itself, however, is the addition of new stages and the ability to play as Yoshi, Mario, Luigi and Wario once you unlock them. Each character has slightly different abilities, adding some freshness to the classic gameplay.

I had a great time revisiting one of my favorites on a fresh little piece of hardware, but in a perfect world, wouldn't it have been great to get an original Mario game? Isn't that the way it used to be? Michael Hobbs



The wireless multiplayer is simple and fun, with the technology working perfectly.

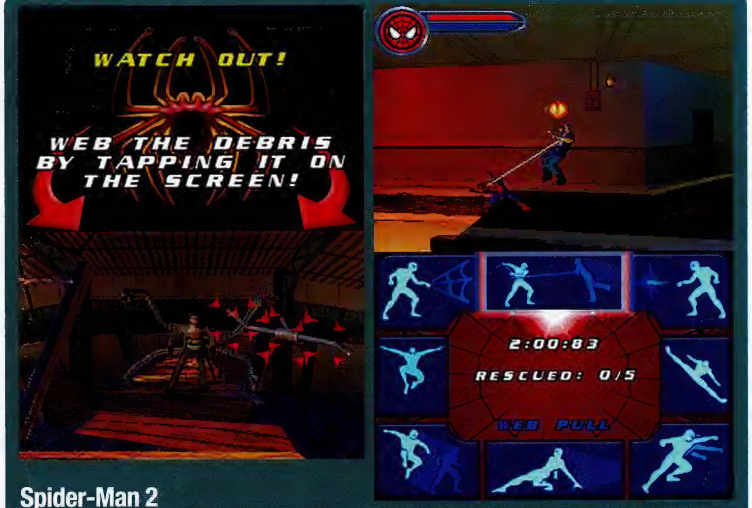




Feel the Magic XX/XY

System: Nintendo DS	Multiplayer: None
Developer: Sonic Team	Available: November
Publisher: Sega	play Rating ★★★☆

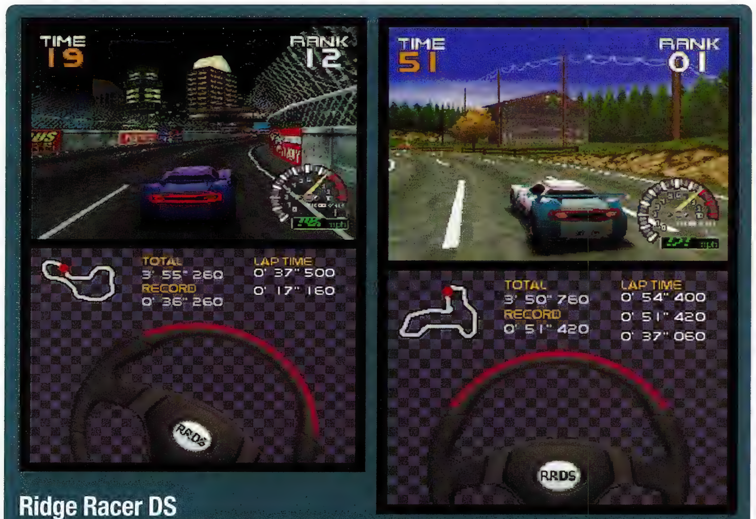
There's never been a game even remotely like Feel the Magic before, and I'll kind of be surprised if there ever is again. As stylized and esoteric as it gets, Feel the Magic is a showcase for the unique abilities of the DS hardware fit into a premise of impressing the girl of your dreams by participating in various minigame performances. The quirky scenarios lend themselves to instant fun—ranging from forced regurgitation of goldfish to fighting plant monsters—and are short and varied enough that no single play style gets old too fast. My only complaint is how your progress goes backwards when you fail at a given task; replaying is one thing, but the negative penalization is just kinda mean. Chris Hoffman



Spider-Man 2

System: Nintendo DS	Multiplayer: None
Developer: Vicarious Visions	Available: November
Publisher: Activision	play Rating ★★★☆

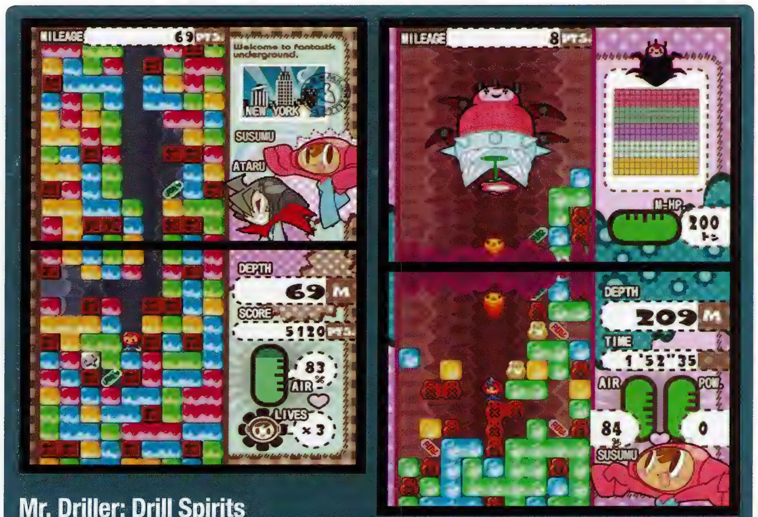
No doubt about it, Spider-Man is the current killer app for the needy DS. Not only does it show off the system's 3D prowess with spectacular animations and BGs throughout, but it utilizes the bottom screen in ways conducive to making future side-scrollers like Castlevania, etc., all the more seamless. For all of its cool gimmicky applications to truly succeed, the DS will need more games like Spidey. On the downside, timed missions are one thing, but tightly woven ones where failing means a do-over rather than a low ranking I think is harsh, especially in a game as unforgiving as this. The melee (keep an eye on that Spidey sense or else) also has its awkward moments, but overall, this is one very long, very impressive game. Dave Halverson


TIME 19
RANK 12
TOTAL 3' 55" 260
LAP TIME 0' 37" 500
RECORD 0' 36" 260
0' 17" 160
RRDS
TIME 51
RANK 01
TOTAL 3' 50" 760
LAP TIME 0' 54" 400
RECORD 0' 51" 420
0' 51" 420
0' 37" 060
RRDS

Ridge Racer DS

System: Nintendo DS
Developer: Nintendo Software Technologies
Publisher: Namco
Multiplayer: 6-player single-cartridge
Available: November
play Rating ★★★⯪

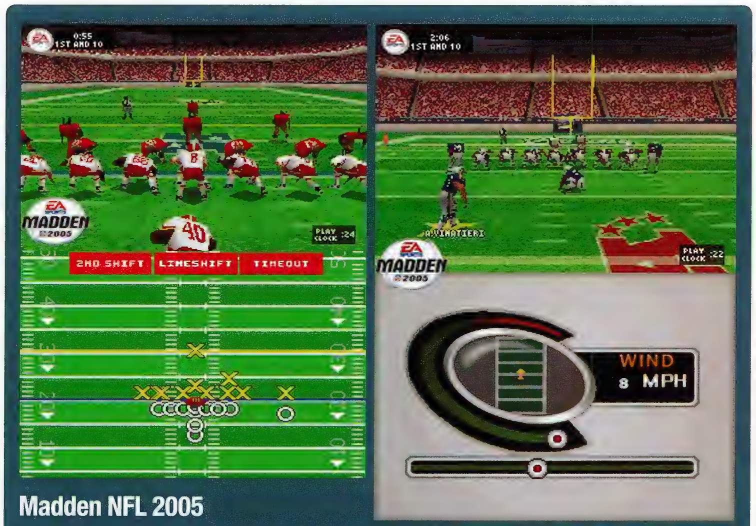
There are a few little things I don't like about Ridge Racer DS, but I'll forgive them all because I love Ridge Racer, and I got that Ridge Racer feeling from this DS version. A conversion of the N64 Ridge Racer featuring courses from RR1, RR Revolution and an original southwestern track, the game boasts just enough 3D detail and speed to make an impression on the small screen. The brilliant track design is there just like an old friend, as is the insanely addictive lift off oversteer. These two elements are preserved, hence the game is a success. What I don't like is the ugly, non-Namco designed interface and screwy button configuration when playing with the stylus, which makes it literally impossible to play with the manual transmission. Michael Hobbs


MILEAGE 69 PTS
Welcome to fantastic underground.
NEW YORK
SUSUMU
ATARU
DEPTH 69 M
SCORE 5120 PTS
83 % AIR
LIVES ×3
MILEAGE 8 PTS
M-HP 200
DEPTH 209 M
TIME 1'52"35
AIR
POW
84
0
SUSUMU

Mr. Driller: Drill Spirits

System: Nintendo DS
Developer: Namco
Publisher: Namco
Multiplayer: 4-player single-cartridge
Available: November
play Rating ★★★☆

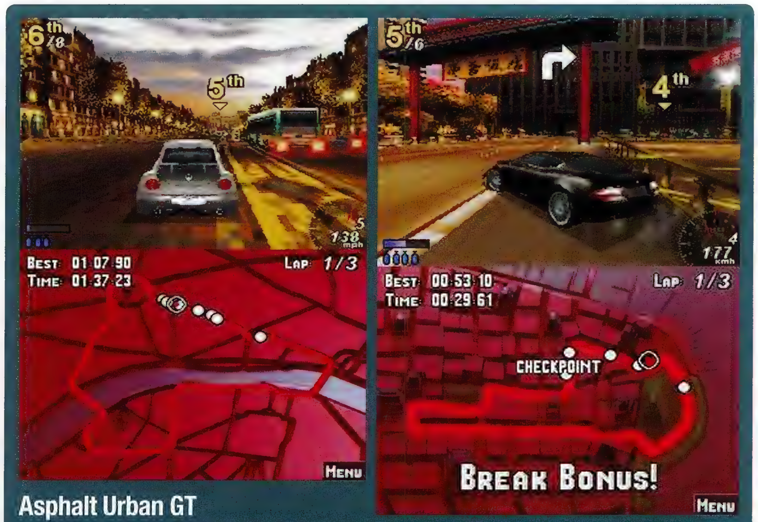
Easy to learn, hard to master, Mr. Driller: Drill Spirits brings Namco's earth-boring puzzle series onto the DS. The simple action quickly becomes addictive, especially as the difficulty ramps up and you have to master the strategic techniques of creating combos or else suffer the consequences (that being suffocation or being squished flat with a big rock)—and that's when you're hooked, telling yourself you'll beat the level after just one more round. Pressure Driller adds a nice twist to the standard formula, as you have to collect capsules to annihilate a giant drill that's approaching from above, and while I personally found playing the old-fashioned way more fun than using the stylus, it's a neat option for those who want it. Chris Hoffman


0:55
1ST AND 10
MADDEN 2005
PLAY CLOCK :24
2ND SHIFT
LINESHIFT
TIMEOUT
2:06
1ST AND 10
A.VINATIERI
MADDEN 2005
PLAY CLOCK :22
WIND 8 MPH

Madden NFL 2005

System: Nintendo DS
Developer: EA
Publisher: EA
Multiplayer: 2-player multi-cartridge
Available: November
play Rating ★★⯪☆

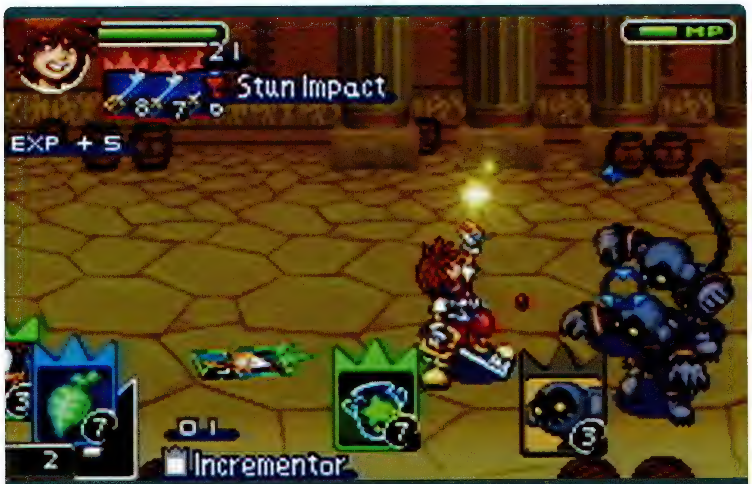
EA's venerable Madden NFL franchise has found its way onto the Nintendo DS, and sadly it's a mixed bag. The feature set is solid—even Madden Challenges made it into the DS version—but where Madden DS falls apart is in its presentation. Graphically, I haven't seen this many jaggy looking players since the Genesis/SNES days. Player animations are also sub-par. Audio is not only muffled but lackluster at best—the play-by-play commentary is not only distorted but you hardly hear any comments aside from an occasional Madden quote. I will give props to EA for fully utilizing the DS's dual-screens—it was nice to be able to pick plays and receivers, as well as call hot routes and audibles, just by touching the screen. Tom Ham


6th /8
5th
138 mph
BEST 01 07 90
TIME 01 37 23
LAP 1/3
MENU
5th /6
4th
177 kmh
BEST 00 53 10
TIME 00 29 61
LAP 1/3
CHECKPOINT
BREAK BONUS!
MENU

Asphalt Urban GT

System: Nintendo DS
Developer: Gameloft
Publisher: Ubisoft
Multiplayer: 4-player multi-cartridge
Available: November
play Rating ★★★☆

Gameloft has come out of the gate smoking with their debut title, Asphalt Urban GT: a significantly juiced version of their impressive Tapwave racer. The graphics, which are stunning overall for a handheld, are hard to define at times—rectified by a few practice laps or switching into first person—but otherwise, this is a gorgeous game by any standards, not to mention a full-fledged, grown-up, evolution-style racer packed with great handling (drifting is easy and key), dream cars of every class and vast tuning options. Steering is done the old-fashioned way, with the bottom screen taking on overhead track report duties and menus (which is fine by me); the music is sweet, as is the event cam, and up to four players can have at it wirelessly. Dave Halverson

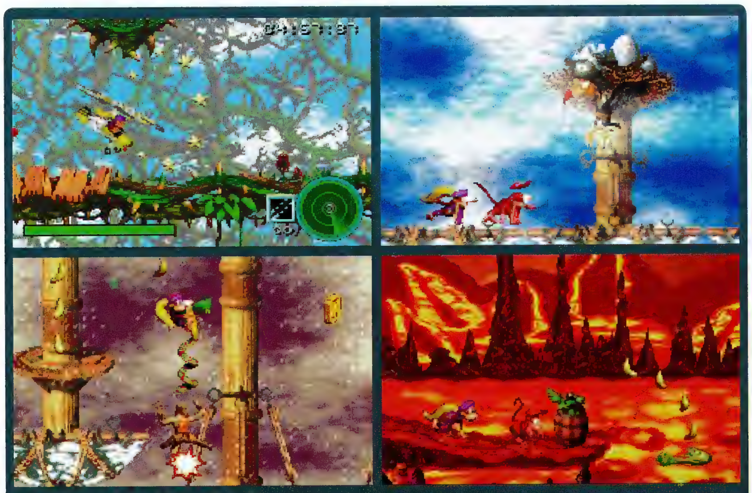


Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories

System: Game Boy Advance	Multiplayer: None
Developer: Jupiter/Square Enix	Available: December
Publisher: Square Enix	**play Rating** ★★⯪☆

Disney, Square Enix and the GBA—it should be a match made in heaven, right? Well, "should" is the operative word. Don't get me wrong—there are certainly good things at work in Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories, not the least of which is the unadulterated charm of once again blending timeless Disney classics like *The Little Mermaid* and *The Nightmare Before Christmas* with Final Fantasy characters and original KH personalities. Even though the plot is basically a device to rehash the stories of the original Kingdom Hearts, it works within its boundaries, making it heartwarming to revisit old friends and old worlds from the PlayStation 2 game. Then realization sets in: these places were much more fun before. The main problem is that almost every world relies on the same formula of wandering to essential plot point rooms in the correct order, without any puzzles or real exploration, then fighting the boss. World layouts are dull thanks to a customizable room generation system, and the real-time combat within them, though fairly fun, seems hindered by the new card aspect of battles rather than enhanced. At least the gameplay is wrapped up in nice visuals and some of the best sound ever heard on the GBA, but I can't help but feel that this game could have been so much more. Chris Hoffman

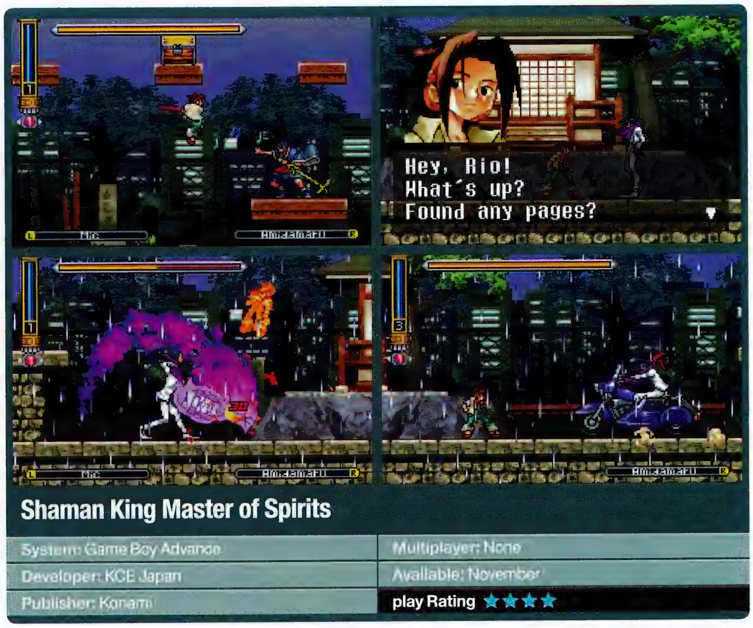
> "...the plot is basically a device to rehash the stories of the original Kingdom Hearts..."



Donkey Kong Country 2

System: Game Boy Advance	Multiplayer: 4-player link-up
Developer: Rare	Available: November
Publisher: Nintendo	**play Rating** ★★★★

All these years later, the banner game in the Donkey Kong arsenal goes down better than ever. With its choice multiplayer extras in tow, this has to be considered one of the best SP games of all time. Back when Rare was the lord of 16-bit, they saw clear to have their lead ape kidnapped, courtesy of Kaptain K. Rool, making room for scene-stealer Diddy and newcomer Dixie Kong to take center stage in this second groundbreaking side-scroller, mixing up the play mechanics via her helicopter spin and cartwheel while adding more vertical play and new beasties like Rattly the rattlesnake, Squitter the spider, Clapper the seal and Glimmer the angler fish. Dave Halverson

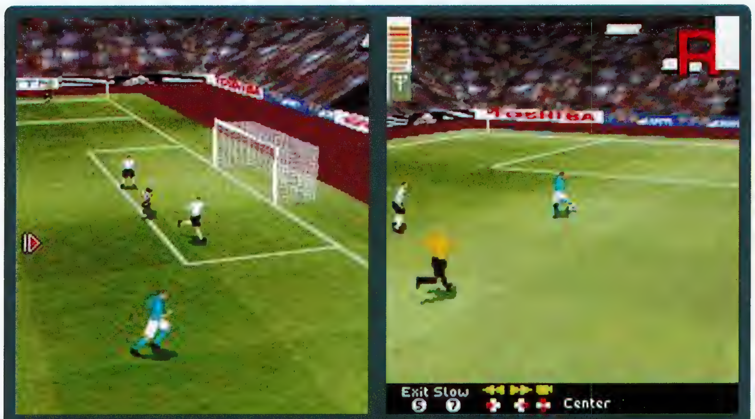


Hey, Rio!
What's up?
Found any pages?

Shaman King Master of Spirits

System: Game Boy Advance	Multiplayer: None
Developer: KCE Japan	Available: November
Publisher: Konami	**play Rating** ★★★★

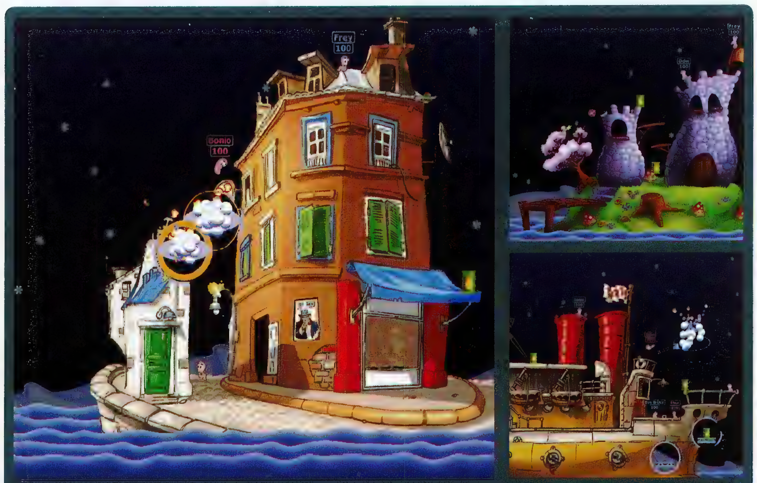
Unlike the PS2 game, you don't have to be a fan of the *Shaman King* TV anime to fall deeply in love with the GBA game. If you like the Metroid-style play of the recent GBA Castlevanias, however, prepare to be very pleasantly surprised. Master of Spirits is essentially Castlevania with added character interaction, more environments and a deeper story, as Yoh and company embark on a mission to reclaim the scattered pages of The Tome of the Shaman to thwart the resurrection of an ancient evil Shaman King. No one does these games as well as Konami, and MoS has all of the trappings of yet another classic. Dave Halverson



FIFA 2005

System: N-Gage
Developer: Electronic Arts
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Multiplayer: 2 players
Available: November
play Rating ★★★★

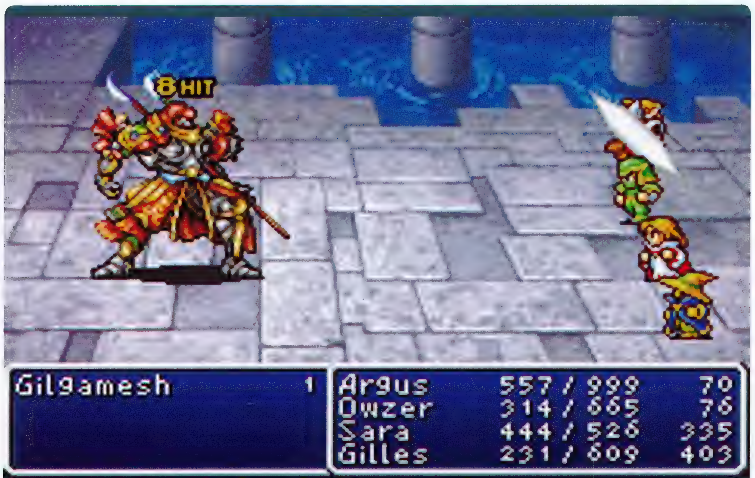
For all it does, the N-Gage is one sweet little machine, and now it's home to a killer game of FIFA. Aside from being doused with every control function in the EA soccer arsenal, as well as Bluetooth multiplayer, the controls are awkward at first but quick to assimilate; the game has great sound, and simple yet effective graphics that don't endeavor to be any more than they need to be. The big attractions here are the fast pace, smooth gameplay, licensed league play and on-the-fly anytime replays. The goal animations are wanting and you may get a little cramp here as things heat up, but this is road-worthy sports gaming all the way. Just try not to scream "GOAL!" from your cubicle… Dave Halverson



Worms World Party

System: N-Gage
Developer: Paragon 5
Publisher: THQ
Multiplayer: 4 players
Available: March
Preview

If you've never played Worms before, this is a great place to start. Pocket gaming (especially Bluetooth-enabled pocket gaming) is perfectly suited to sadistic turn-based action-strategy where little worms do horrible things to entertain the masses. Beats the hook, I suppose. N-Gage exclusives like Matchmaking—which helps you find combatants of equal ability—and tournaments such as "Worm King" and "Survival of the Wormiest" make this a great game of Worms for even the most seasoned larva jockey, and the game's rich 2D graphics (complete with great music and voice) lend themselves nicely to the N-Gage's wee size. Fully customizable, down to choosing names and how many players per map, this is the real deal, on the go. Dave Halverson



Final Fantasy I & II: Dawn of Souls

System: Game Boy Advance
Developer: Square Enix
Publisher: Nintendo
Multiplayer: None
Available: November
play Rating ★★★★

Despite their obvious age, the early Final Fantasy games will always be classics, and what better way to get reacquainted with them than with these enhanced versions on GBA? As was true of previous remakes, both Final Fantasy I and II have been visually enhanced for their latest iterations, and the sound is awesome for the GBA (Square Enix definitely knows audio tricks on the GBA that others don't), but the gameplay, for the most part, remains tried and true. The difficulty has been toned down in Final Fantasy I (it plays like the easy mode in FF Origins), but the insane encounter rate has not; sometimes you can't take a single step without another random battle. No enhancements have been made to the story either, meaning that, nostalgia aside, FF1 can get to be pretty darn tedious, and the new dungeons don't alleviate that (even if they are neat additions). Final Fantasy II, meanwhile, holds up extremely well, with an excellent story and fleshed-out characters. I was kind of hoping for a traditional experience system to be implemented, but that's not the case; however, the difficulty in FFII has been tweaked as well, alleviating any frustration from its unique stat-specific leveling. If you already have FF Origins, you may want to pass, but if you don't, this is a must-have RPG, if just for FFII alone. Chris Hoffman

"Final Fantasy II…holds up extremely well, with an excellent story and fleshed-out characters."

java.com@play

sponsored by Java

Java[tm] technology represents a positive experience for all who make it part of their lifestyle, making it one of the hottest software platforms in the world. Mobile phone users choose Java-powered handsets so they can play the latest games and get cool services like real-time sports scores and chat. PC buyers choose systems to get access to the widest selection of applications available. And people in the market for software know that Java-powered applications deliver the highest level of flexibility and security.

Find out why 9 million people each month visit java.com, the ultimate marketplace for Java technology. Check back here each month for the latest Java software innovations, games and technology

Top Mobile Picks

Go to java.com for prices and compatibility

Bejeweled Multiplayer

Bejeweled Multiplayer is one-on-one real-time competition on your mobile phone. Choose your opponent and enter gem-filled caves for intense head-to-head competition.

Publisher: Sony Pictures Mobile
Type: Mobile
Carrier/Handset Info:
AT&T I Sprint
AudioVox CDM 9950, Hitachi P300, LG 5350 I TP5350, Motorola T721, Nokia 6225, Samsung N400 I A500 I A600 I A620 I A660 I A680, Sanyo 4900 I 4920 I 5300 I 5400 I 7200 I 7300 I 8100 I 8200, Smartphone Treo 600, Sony Ericsson P300

W03
0001648
OPTIONS

Quantum Blast

In Quantum Blast, you'll shoot as many things as possible—as most of them are going to be shooting at you! Fortunately, your weapons fire automatically whenever there are enemies nearby. Move around the screen in this mobile action game to avoid colliding with enemy ships and gunfire, and blast away. Watch out—there is probably a "guardian" with excessive weaponry waiting for you before you complete each level.

Publisher: Blue Sphere Games
Type: Mobile
Carrier/Handset Info:
T-Mobile
Motorola V300, Nokia 3100 I 3200 I 3205 I 3300 I 3510i I 3530 I 3587i I 3590 I 3600 I 3650 I 3620 I 3660 I5100 I 6100 I 6108 I 6200 I 6220 I 6225 I 6560 I 6585 I 6610 I 6600 I 6800 I 6820 I 7200 I 7210 I 7250 I 7250i I 7650 I 8910i I V500 I V525 I V600 I Ngage, Sagem myV-65, Samsung S300, Sharp GX10 I GX10i, Siemens GX20 I GX30

Spider-Man™ vs. Doc Ock

Take on the role of Spider-Man in this ultimate mobile action-adventure game. You'll swing through the city facing your arch nemesis, Doc Ock.

Publisher: Sony Pictures Mobile
Type: Mobile
Carrier/Handset Info:
Bell Mobility
Audiovox 8455 I 8450, Samsung SPH-N400 I SPH-a660 I SPH-a600, Sanyo 8100

0000 I 500
OPTION

Plasma

Asteroid 101, in the distant galaxy of Kraken, is a somber and dangerous place. Many advance teams from the Planetary Mining Corp. have gone missing, and mineral exploitation and colonization of this remote outpost has been seriously delayed. In the mobile action game Plasma, your mission is to prepare Asteroid 101 for the arrival of the settlers, and if that means wiping out every single trace of alien life with the help of your trusty plasma gun, so be it!

Publisher: Quantum Blast
Type: Mobile
Carrier/Handset Info:
T-Mobile
LG 8100, Motorola A835 I A925 I I730 I I95cl, Nokia 3100 I 3200 I 3205 I 3300 I 3510i I 3530 I 3587i I 3590 I 3600 I3650 I 3620 I 3660 I 5100 I 6100 I 6108 I 6200 I 6220 I 6225 I 6560 I 6585 I 6600 I 6610 I 6800 I 6820 I 7200 I 7210 I 7250 I 7250i I 7650 I 8910i I Ngage Sagem 7600 I myV-65, Samsung myX-7 I myV-75 I S300, Sharp Z100 I GX10 I GX10i

QTR 1
2:50
:12
ATL: 0
STL: 0
#7 VICK

NFL Football 2005

The fun and excitement of professional football comes to life in the palm of your hand with NFL Football 2005. There is no substitute for the real thing. Play with real NFL players and teams as you conquer a full NFL season—complete with playoffs and the big game!

Publisher: THQ Wireless
Type: Mobile
Carrier/Handset Info:
T-Mobile: Motorola v600, Motorola v300, Nokia 6800
AT&T: Nokia 7210, Nokia 6800, Nokia 6200, Motorola v600, Nokia 3300 (Americas), Nokia 3100 (Americas), Nokia 6820, Nokia 3200 (Americas)
Cingular: Nokia 3590, Motorola T720 (GSM), Nokia 6100, Nokia 6800, Nokia 6200, Nokia 3560, Motorola v600, Nokia 3300 (Americas), Nokia 3595, Samsung SGH-S307, Nokia 3100 (Americas), Samsung SGH-X427, Nokia 3200 (Americas), Nokia 6560, Motorola V400
Sprint PCS: Sanyo SCP-5300, Samsung SPH-A600, Samsung VGA1000, Samsung A660, Sanyo SCP-5400 / RL2500, Samsung VM-A680, Sanyo SCP-5500 / VM4500, LG VI-5225, Nokia 6225, Sanyo PM-8200, Sanyo RL-4920, Sanyo RL- 7300
Nextel: Motorola i730, Motorola i733, Motorola i736, Motorola i830, Motorola i710

Yao Ming Basketball '04

Ever wonder what it's like to be Yao Ming or shoot hoops like a dominant center? Now's your chance. In Yao Ming Basketball '04, two-on-two mobile sports match-ups lets you play either as Yao or against Yao. Shoot the three-point shot or pass the ball into the post for board-shattering jams. Then, apply all-world defense with deflections and in-your-face blocks.

Publisher: Sorrent
Type: Mobile

Carrier/Handset Info:
Bell Mobility
Audiovox 8455 I 8450, Samsung SPH-N400 I SPH-a600, Sanyo 8100, Sprint, AT&T, Nextel, Boost, Cingular

Star Marauder
Help
End

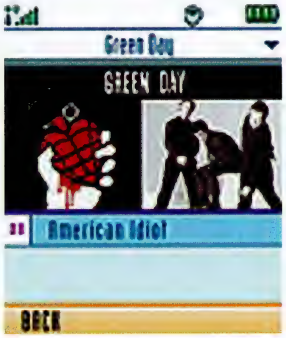
Star Marauder

Try out a mobile version of the classic, rare and much-loved arcade game, Star Castle. In Star Marauder, take your craft behind enemy lines and destroy their bases, one by one—but watch out, the farther you go, the better their defenses become. Shoot out the spinning shields, but avoid the cannon fire and smart bombs!

Publisher: Mpowers, LLC
Type: Mobile
Carrier/Handset Info:
AT&T: mMode phones I Cingular I o2 I Orange I Sprint: Vision-enabled phones I T-Mobile I Vodafone
Nokia 2270, 3100, 3200, 3300, 3510i, 3530, 3585, 3586, 3590, 3595, 3600, 3620, 3650, 3660, 5100, 6100, 6200, 6220, 6310i, 6800, 6820, 7210, 7250, 7250i, 7650, 6000 Series, N-Gage, Motorola C330, C350, C450, C550, C650, T721 GSM, T722i GSM, Sharp GX-10, GX-12, Sagem myX-5, myX-6, Sendo X, LG5350, Sendo M550, M551, M570, M571, Siemens M55, s56, S56, A56, M56, SL56, SL45i, SL55, SX1, X, Sony Ericsson P800, P900, Z600, T610, T616, T630, T68i, Samsung A500, N400, i600, SGH-S300, Sanyo 4900, 5300, 8100, palmOne Treo 600.

Tech Center

Warner Mobile Music Streaming Jukebox

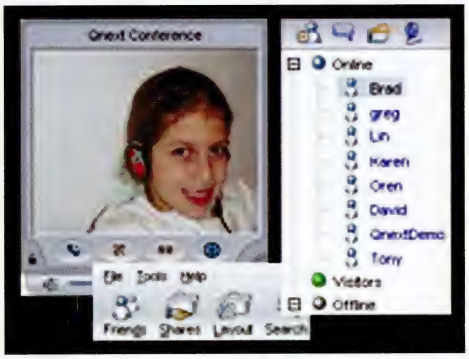


Take your favorite artist with you wherever you go! Warner Mobile Music Streaming Jukebox gives you access to ringtones, the ability to view and download artist images, the latest information and exclusive offers from your favorite artists and more. You can even stream actual music clips on your mobile handset.

Publisher: Warner Music Group • **Type:** Mobile • **Carrier/Handset Info:** AT&T, Motorola V600

Killer Desktop App

Qnext



An amazing application that has been described as the "Swiss Army knife of Internet communications tools," Qnext is a powerful P2P desktop client. Through one interface, instant message users can chat between Qnext, MSN Messenger, ICQ, Yahoo and AIM. You can send and receive large files, start a video conference, initiate audio chats, share photos and files, play online games and access your computer remotely!

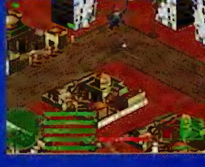
Publisher: Qnext • **Type:** Desktop

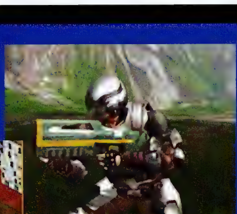
Desktop Adventures

Command and Conquer™: Attack Copter

Based on the wildly popular Command & Conquer series from Electronic Arts, this desktop adventure game offers nine intense regular missions and two bonus missions. Armed with rockets and guns, in Command and Conquer: Attack Copter, you'll control the army's next-generation stealth reconnaissance attack helicopter, RAH-66 Comanche, to rescue hostages, protect caravans and complete timed missions, ensuring security on the ground.

Publisher: Electronic Arts
Type: Desktop





Chrome

Chrome is a heavy action-shooting game full of sudden twists and turns. Choose your weapons,equipment and implants for 14 difficult high-tech missions. Create breathtaking chases using futuristic vehicles! Transform yourself and storm past enemy lines!

Publisher: Techland
Type: Desktop

27
33
12
play anime

BASED ON THE LEGENDARY STORY BY SHIROW
SOUNDTRACK FEATURING:
BOOM BOOM SATELLITES, PAUL OAKENFOLD,
BASEMENT JAXX, CARL CRAIG VS ADULT.,
AKUFEN, ATOM™, T. RAUMSCHMIERE,
RYUICHI SAKAMOTO

MASAMUNE CREATOR OF THE GHOST IN THE SHELL.
IN THEATRES JANUARY 2005

APPLESEED

アップルシード

HUMANITY'S LAST CHANCE FOR SURVIVAL.

"APPLESEED" BASED ON THE MANGA "APPLESEED" BY SHIROW MASAMUNE (SEISHINSHA PUBLISHING) DIRECTOR SHINJI ARAMAKI PRODUCER SORI WRITER HARUKA HANDA TSUTOMU KAMISHIRO EXECUTIVE PRODUCER SUMIJI MIYAKE PRODUCER HIDENORI UEKI NAOKO WATANABE ASSOCIATE PRODUCER NORIO KONISHI CG PRODUCER YUSAKU TOYOSHIMA CG DIRECTOR YASUHIRO OTSUKA CHARACTER DESIGN MASAKI YAMADA MUSIC PRODUCER SHIN YASUI SCORE MUSIC TETSUYA TAKAHASHI PRODUCTION DIGITAL FRONTIER MUSIC BY BOOM BOOM SATELLITES CONTRIBUTING MUSIC ARTISTS PAUL OAKENFOLD BASEMENT JAXX CARL CRAIG VS. ADULT. AKUFEN ATOM™ T. RAUMSCHMIERE RYUICHI SAKAMOTO

APPLESEED FILM ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK BY SONY MUSIC RECORDS, INC. ©2004 SHIROW MASAMUNE/SEISHINSHA APPLESEED FILM PARTNERS (APPLESEED FILM PARTNERS ARE MICOTT & BASARA, TBS, GENEON ENTERTAINMENT, YAMATO, TOHO, TYO, DIGITAL FRONTIER AND MBS). © 2004 GENEON ENTERTAINMENT (USA) INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

THIS FILM HAS NOT BEEN RATED

MICOTT & BASARA INC.

TOFU

DOLBY DIGITAL

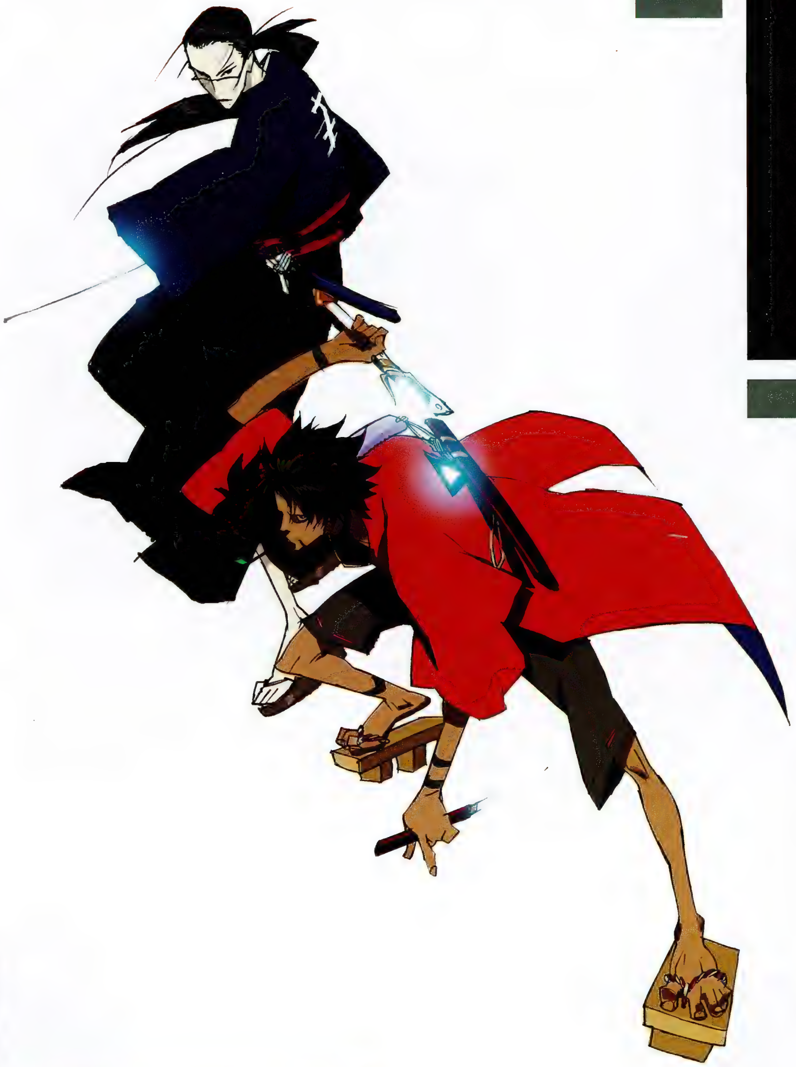
TBS

geneon

WWW.APPLESEEDTHEMOVIE.COM

Samurai Champloo

Cooler than any of us deserve



Throughout the history of filmed and animated entertainment, select few works are regarded as so revolutionary that they significantly raised the bar in some way…*Toy Story* for CG features, *2001: A Space Odyssey* for science fiction, *The Titanic* for epic drama, *Kill Bill Volumes 1 & 2* for everything else, etc. Where anime is concerned, one such recent milestone was *Cowboy Bebop*, directed by Shinichiro Watanabe, who does the honors here, along with character designer Kazuto Nakazawa of *Kill Bill Volume 1* fame. Nothing like a little pedigree to get things buzzing. *Bebop* wasn't just cool…it manufactured it, oozed it even. The opening credits alone had us drooling before we even met Spike Spiegel and Faye Valentine, two of the coolest cohorts to ever leak out the end of a drawing utensil. Since, *Dead Leaves*, *FLCL* and *Abenobashi* have raised the bar on the bizarre, but nothing (save maybe *Heat Guy J*) has even come close to being as cool…until now. *Samurai Champloo* is breakthrough entertainment in every way, not to mention irrefutable evidence that Japan can take our most crude, over exploited pop-culture flavors and whip them into tasty, soulful soufflé. The fusion of anime and hip-hop in Champloo wipes the floor with the diseased content that spews out of the likes of EA, and Hollywood, to the point of embarrassment. If hip-hop aspired to this level of cool in the U.S., I might even become a fan, beyond the odd Eminem video.

Samurai Champloo is the story of two nearly invincible samurai who want nothing more than to fight to the death, just as soon as they don't need one another any longer. Mugen is the cold-hearted, womanizing, hyper-violent thug to Jin's honorable, good-mannered ronin: opposing forces linked by circumstances arising from taking the high ground (after covering it with blood) in a prefecture where doing so isn't recommended. Only Fuu, the ditzy waitress that saves them from losing their heads, stands between them as they embark on a pilgrimage to find a samurai that smells like sunflowers. I believe that's all you need to know for now, as this is a recipe best savored with as little preconception as possible. Dave Halverson

Samurai Champloo

+ Insane animation, outstanding designs, great music, great story...it's all *so* good!

− Eventually it will end, and we'll have to wait another three years for the next, next big thing.

Released by: Geneon Entertainment
Rating: 16 and up
Running Time: 100 minutes
Volume: 1

play Rating ★★★★

> "Samurai Champloo is breakthrough entertainment in every way..."

A little fire can't deter Mugen and Jin.

PlayStation.2
FULLMETAL ALCHEMIST
SQUARE ENIX

TWO BROTHERS ONE MISSION

Edward and Alphonse Elric must restore their bodies by finding the legendary Philosopher's Stone which holds unlimited power. But they are not alone.

FULLMETAL ALCHEMIST™

AIRING SATURDAYS
[adult swim]™
CARTOON NETWORK®
adultswim.com

Available on DVD February 8th

Also Available: Collector's Edition Metal Box with Fullmetal Alchemist Soundtrack 1

www.fullmetalalchemist.com

Play the new game for your PlayStation® 2 computer entertainment system from

SQUARE ENIX.
www.square-enix.com
Published by Square Enix, Inc.

ANIPLEX | BEST BUY | amazon.com. | SUNCOAST The store for movie lovers | MEDIA PLAY.COM | fye | sam goody | Waldenbooks BRENTANO'S | Z STORE.com | FUNimation Productions, Ltd.

©HIROMU ARAKAWA/SQUARE ENIX, MBS, ANX, BONES, dentsu 2004. Licensed by FUNimation® Productions Ltd. All Rights Reserved. CARTOON NETWORK, ADULT SWIM and logos are trademarks of and © 2004 Cartoon Network. A Time Warner Company. All Rights Reserved. © 2004 SQUARE ENIX CO., LTD. AllRights Reserved. © HIROMU ARAKAWA/SQUARE ENIX, MBS,ANX, BONES, dentsu 2004. FULLMETAL ALCHEMIST, SQUARE ENIX, and the SQUARE ENIX logo are trademarks of Square Enix Co., Ltd. All rights reserved. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. The ratings icon is a trademark of the Entertainment Software Association. CARTOON NETWORK, ADULT SWIM and logos are trademarks of and © 2004 Cartoon Network. A Time Warner Company. All Rights Reserved.

The Daichis

Earth's Defense Family

The family that slays together, stays together

I've been watching anime religiously since I was a wee lad, so I think I'm a fair judge of the odd sleeper hit, of which *The Daichis Earth's Defense Family* is my latest libation. This splendidly animated slice of super-life nearly out-incredibles *The Incredibles*, provided you prefer the wickedly animated over the wickedly rendered, and the slightly off-kilter and somewhat risqué over the safe and sane. I loved *The Incredibles* in all of its wholesome glory, but this reluctant super-family is riddled with enough psychosis to short-circuit Dr. Phil, making their newfound job as defenders of the Earth a conundrum of biblical proportions.

Falling on the eve of their impending divorce, the Daichi house is visited by a strange presence (by way of a dream-inducing fax message) proclaiming their newfound duties as defenders of the Earth; the catch being that in order to reap the 9.8 million yen reward per eradication, they must stay together as a family or else suffer the wrath of the Galactic Federation court, which doesn't make mother, who had one foot out the door, happy in the least. In order to succeed in beating down the massive alien invaders plummeting to Earth, they must all activate their Earth Defender Cards and work as a team, which means putting their personal demons aside, which in this family could fill a small arena: dad's an overweight programmer in a dead end job; mom's an abrasive, self-centered overachiever frustrated with married life; daughter Nozomi is dealing with a major identity crisis; and Dai, the family small fry, is as unhinged as they come—quirks that, once transformed, are magnified into superpowers so omnipotent you'll be pounding the rewind. Nestled within an almost unbelievably beautiful show for a 15 episode series—surpassing many an animated feature in the animation department—along with the soundtrack and voice talent to back it all up, the Daichis deserve your undivided attention.

Dave Halverson

The Daichis: Earth's Defense Family

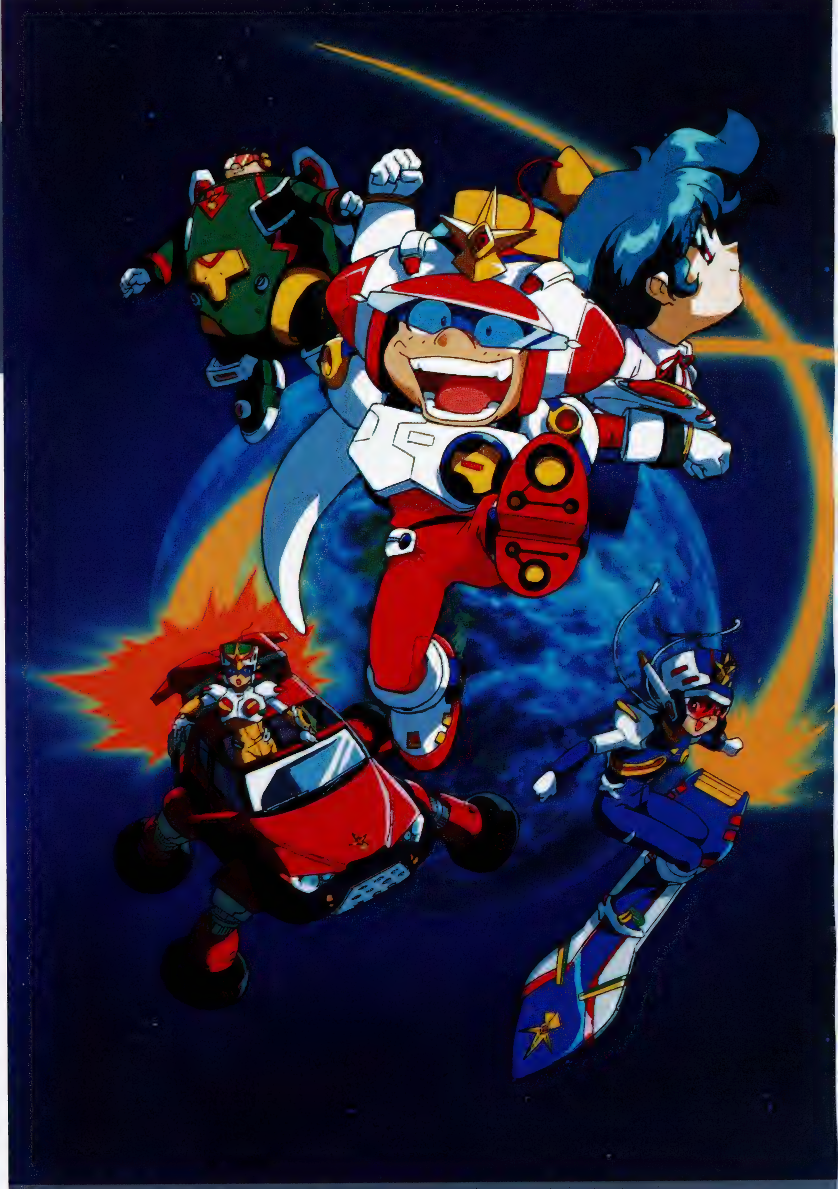
+ Some of the coolest transformation sequences in recent memory.

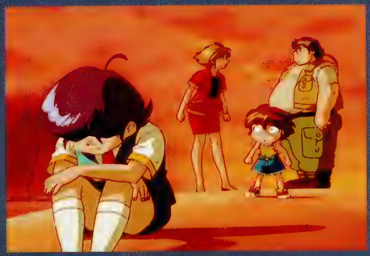
- Transformation sequences are as passé as sexy cyber-maids.

Released by: Geneon Entertainment
Rating: 13 and up
Running Time: 125 minutes
Volume: 1 - "Dysfunctional Heroes"

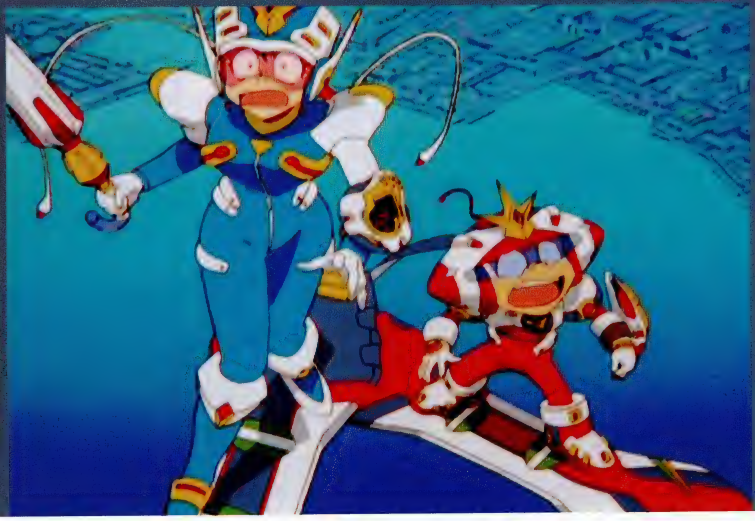
play Rating ★★★½

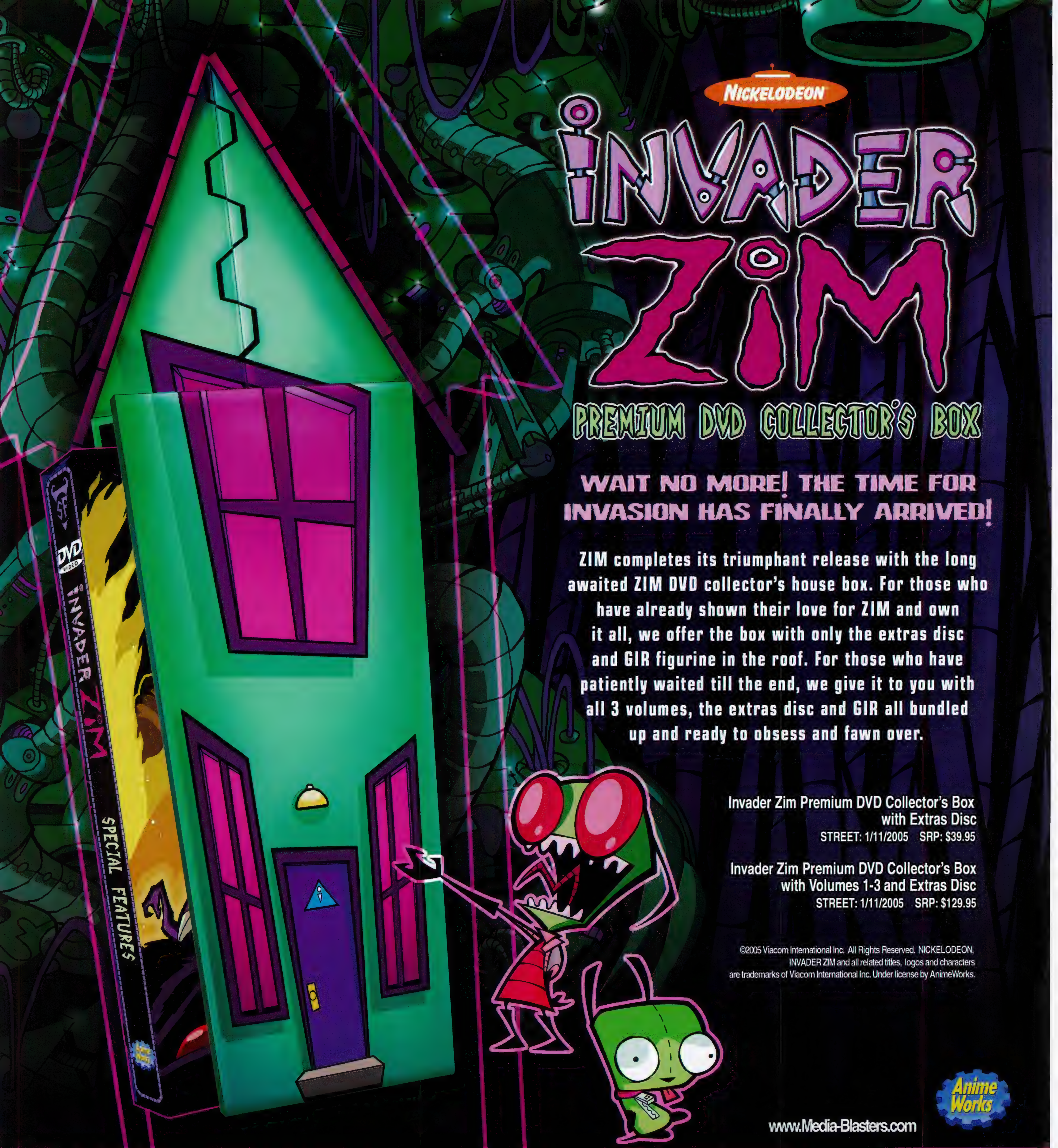
> "...this reluctant super-family is riddled with enough psychosis to short-circuit Dr. Phil..."





Dai gets ready to lay the smack down on an alien nasty of epic proportions.





NICKELODEON

INVADER ZIM

PREMIUM DVD COLLECTOR'S BOX

WAIT NO MORE! THE TIME FOR INVASION HAS FINALLY ARRIVED!

ZIM completes its triumphant release with the long awaited ZIM DVD collector's house box. For those who have already shown their love for ZIM and own it all, we offer the box with only the extras disc and GIR figurine in the roof. For those who have patiently waited till the end, we give it to you with all 3 volumes, the extras disc and GIR all bundled up and ready to obsess and fawn over.

Invader Zim Premium DVD Collector's Box
with Extras Disc
STREET: 1/11/2005 SRP: $39.95

Invader Zim Premium DVD Collector's Box
with Volumes 1-3 and Extras Disc
STREET: 1/11/2005 SRP: $129.95

©2005 Viacom International Inc. All Rights Reserved. NICKELODEON, INVADER ZIM and all related titles, logos and characters are trademarks of Viacom International Inc. Under license by AnimeWorks.

Anime Works

www.Media-Blasters.com

AVAILABLE AT:

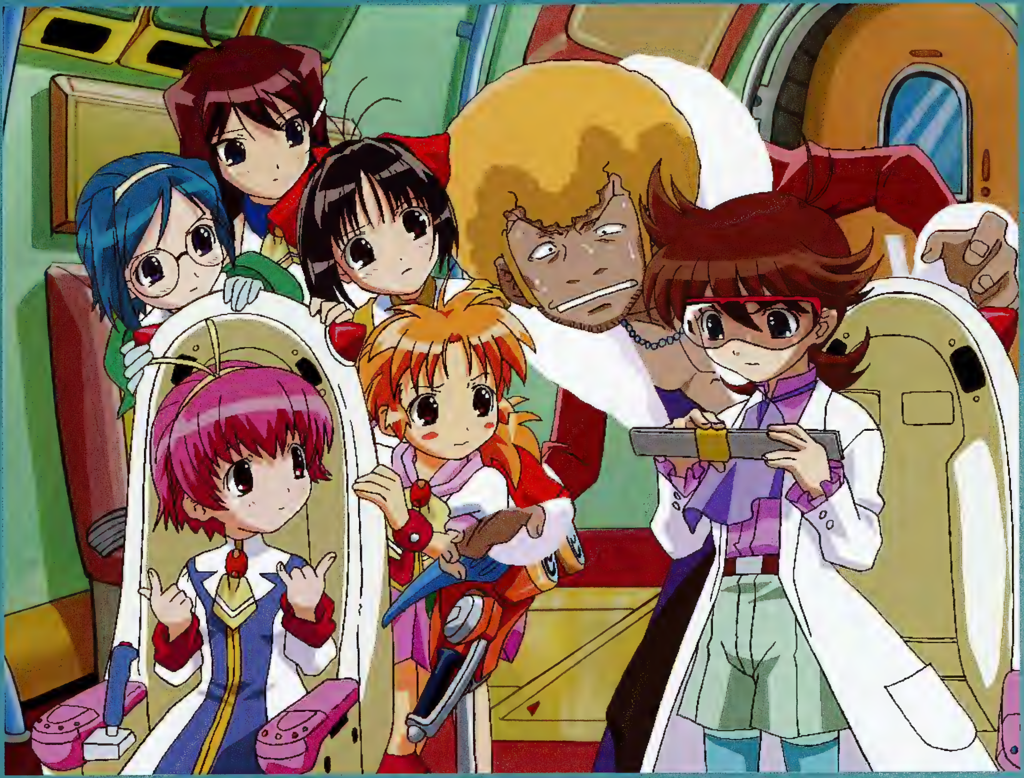
SUNCOAST℠ Where You Buy Movies
BARNES&NOBLE.com www.bn.com
Buy.com
fye
samgoody
BEST BUY
amazon.com and you're done.

Wandaba Style

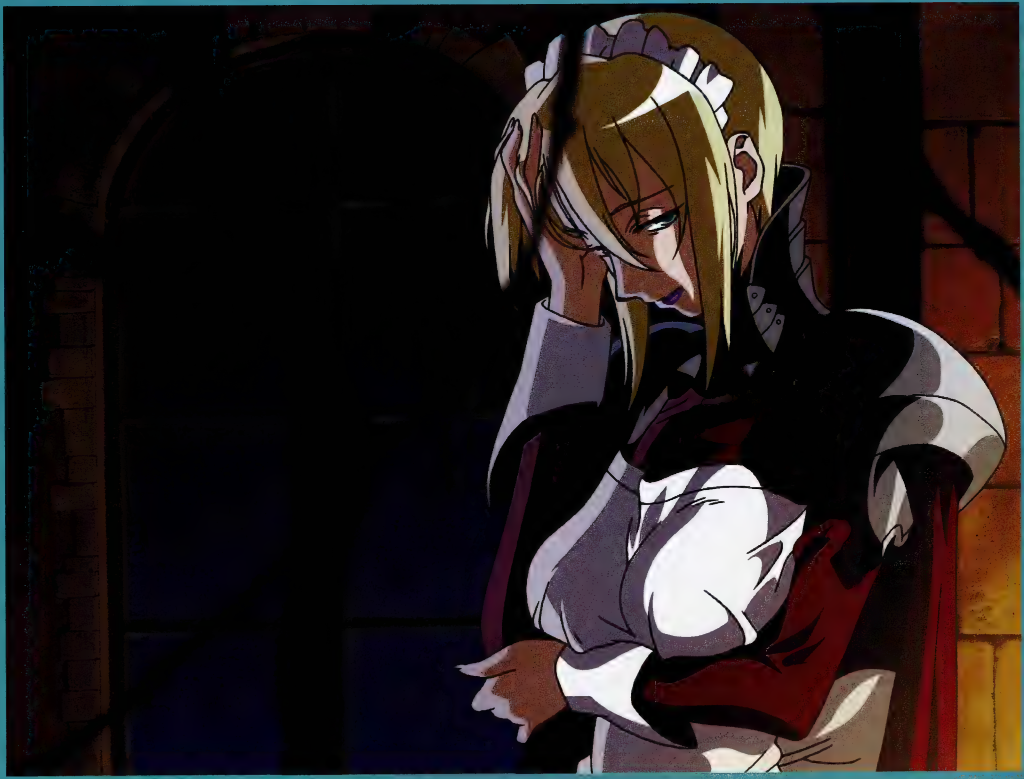
Houston, we have a major problem

Released by: ADV Films
Rating: TV-PG
Running Time: 125 minutes
Volume: 1
play Rating ★★★☆

Try this one on for size…in the future of reality TV, people no longer crave the empty titillation of T&A, at least not as long as they can tune in to the latest moon launch from Dr. Susumo Tsukumo, the billionaire boy genius convinced that the U.S. never landed on the moon—an honor he'll be more than happy to accept…if he ever manages to get the trajectory right. This poses a problem for blonde-fro'd genius-manager extraordinaire Michael Hanagaga, who's trying desperately to get his latest all-girl pop group, Mix Juice (a rag-tag ensemble of wannabe pop head cases from different sides of the fence) exploited, er, a spot on prime time TV. Soon these two will converge in a hail of absurdity. It's not so much that Tsukumo is trying to get to the moon as much as it's the way he's going about it: using his synthetic femme-bot Kiku #8 to man contraptions that would make Wile E. Coyote run for cover. When his first attempt via giant rubber band goes awry (oh yeah, you gotta see it to believe it), sticking Kiku with a very long, very hot reentry process, guess who volunteers the first human subjects, selling it to TV as the first concert from space? You got it. Little do the girls know that they have a much better chance of meeting their maker than they do any future fans. This one's a little weird, but loaded with fun and fan service (that would be panty and/or gratuitous booby shots), so be warned. Dave Halverson



"…they have a much better chance of meeting their maker than they do any future fans."



"…any red-blooded American teen would wear his weenie out given said circumstances."

Hanaukyo Maid Team

Maids in Japan

Released by: Geneon Entertainment
Rating: 16 and up
Running Time: 100 minutes
Volume: 1 - "How do you do, Master?"
play Rating ★★★☆

Normally I'd treat any anime involving a young boy and jelly-breasted servants like a shiny silver non-lethal shuriken. I mean, this well is long dry and it's always the same story: shy testosterone-intolerant virgin weakling inherits fortune or home, boobs and sexual innuendo fly, and we spend episode after episode watching said fruity boy get his head wedged between melons and doing nothing about it. Having been 13 once, I can assure you any red-blooded American teen would wear his weenie out given said circumstances. But I digress, because *Hanaukyo Maid Team* veers ever so slightly from the path in a fashion worthy of any boob-lover's undivided attention. Taro Hanaukyo doesn't just get a house or a maid; when his grandpa decides to disappear and appoint him head of the family after his parents' demise, he inherits a compound, staffed by not one or even 10 shapely maids, but a veritable maid army departmentalized between security forces, finance, food service, dressers, a personal servant, bed warmers, bathers and so on. The guy makes Arthur look like a homeless bum, opening up the sitcom floodgates with something fierce, leading to so much upper-crusty, over-sexed, ultra-materialistic debauchery we forget that the focal point is a kid we'd all have pummeled to death in junior high. Dave Halverson

SAiYUKi
Requiem
THE MOTION PICTURE
The mistakes of the past are paid for in blood from the future...
SAiYUKi Requiem THE MOTION PICTURE
This is their
REQUIEM.

GET READY FOR THE RIDE OF YOUR LIFE!
Saiyuki: Requiem, The Motion Picture is available on DVD
January 18th, 2005 for 29.98 SRP

amazon.com and you're done.
fye
Fry's Electronics
BEST BUY BestBuy.com
SUNCOAST The store for movie lovers.
FEATURED ON ANIME NETWORK
ADV FILMS
www.advfilms.com

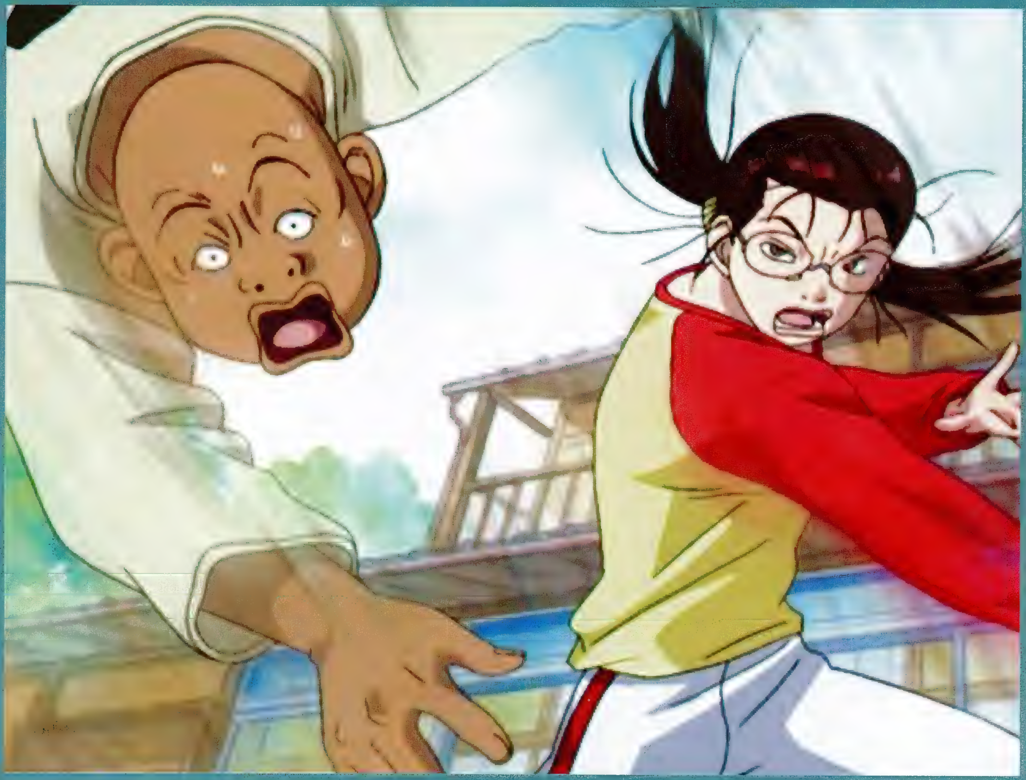
001 KAZUYA MINEKURA/ISSAISHA • SAIYUKI THE MOVIE PROJECT

The GokuSen

Anti-social studies

Released by: Anime Works
Rating: 13 and up
Running Time: 125 minutes
Volume: 1 - "The Unteachables"
play Rating ★★★☆

You don't have to go far to find scores of scholastic hi-jinks in anime. From *Ping Pong Club* to *GTO*, the majority of anime-kind revolves around that lovely place we all spent way too much time in: high school. So here's a fresh scenario for you to send it all screaming back, zits and all. Kumiko Yamaguchi is reporting for duty for her first day on the job as a teacher—thus fulfilling her lifelong dream to enlighten the youth of Japan—coincidentally starting on the same day as one Mrs. Fujiyama, whose big breasts and thick lips are a complete contrast to Kumiko's athletic stature. Enter plot device number one: it's an all-boy school; number two: the vice principal is a militant freak with an agenda; and number 3: Kumiko's class is wall-to-wall hardcore bad boys so nasty that it's required the ladies to lose their street clothes and don zipped-up track suits so as to not arouse the student body. The twist? Kumiko is also ruling head of the Oedo Yakuza family, home to an army of hitmen—most of which she can take down without breaking a sweat—and one seriously whacked out talking bulldog. Didn't see the talkin' dog comin' did ya? Wonder if the producer saw *Little Nicky*. That'd make two of us. Dave Halverson



"The twist? Kumiko is also ruling head of the Oedo Yakuza family..."

ADV Films and Play present

Contest of the North Star!

Enter to win one of the following fabulous prizes at www.playmagazine.com

- **1ST PRIZE**

A *Fist of the North Star* poster signed by Buronson Tetsuo Hara, creator of *Fist of the North Star*! Plus, all three *New Fist of the North Star* DVDs by ADV Films, a two-year subscription to Play magazine and a copy of Play magazine's Girls of Gaming (and anime) V2!

- **2ND PRIZE**

All three *New Fist of the North Star* DVDs and a one-year subscription to Play magazine.

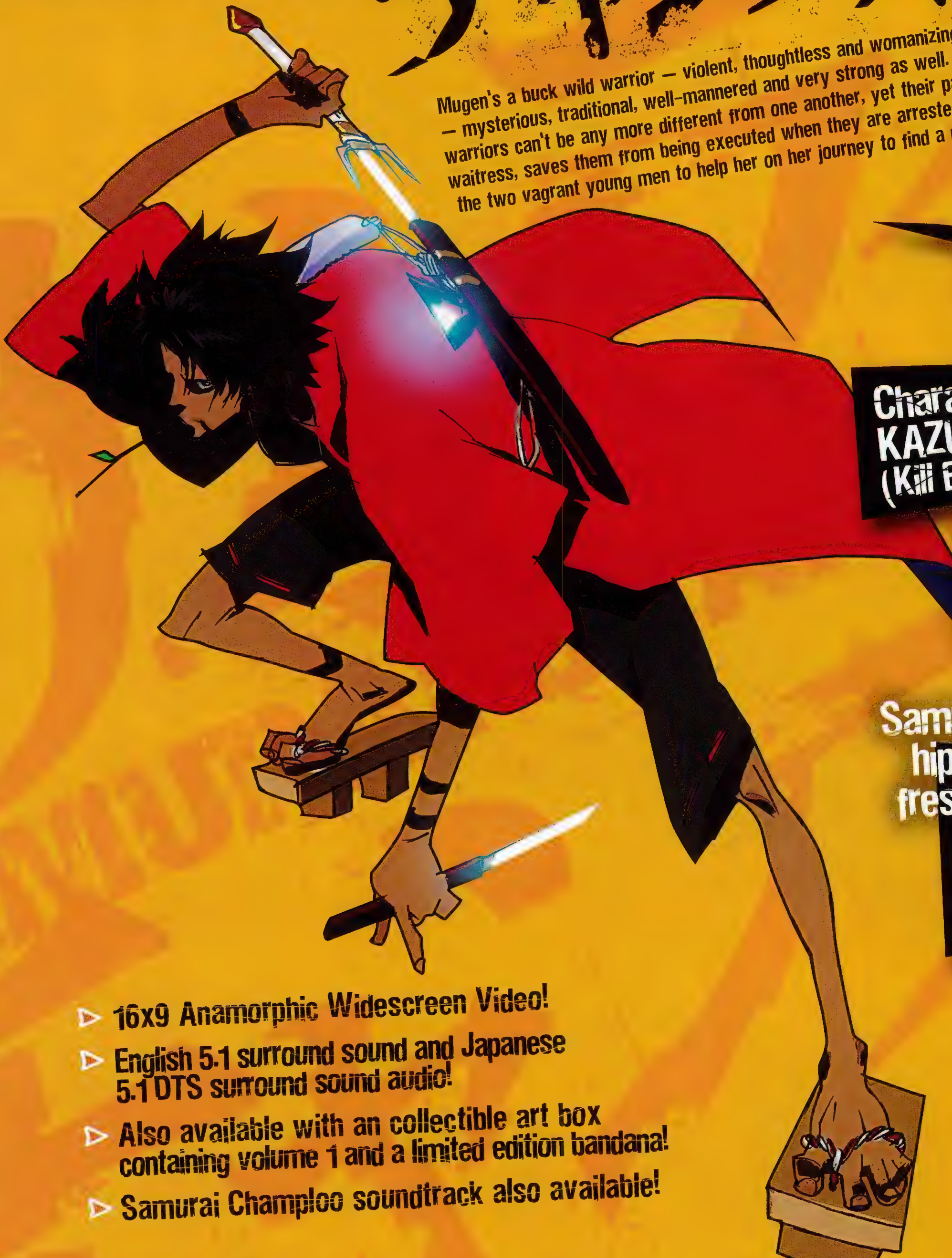
- **3RD PRIZE**

The first two volumes of the *New Fist of the North Star* and a one-year subscription to Play.

Current subscribers will get additional year(s) free. Good Luck!

サムライチャンプルー
SAMURAI CHAMPLOO

Mugen's a buck wild warrior — violent, thoughtless and womanizing. Jin is a vagrant ronin — mysterious, traditional, well-mannered and very strong as well. These two fiercely independent warriors can't be any more different from one another, yet their paths cross when Fuu, a ditzy waitress, saves them from being executed when they are arrested after a violent swordfight. Fuu convinces the two vagrant young men to help her on her journey to find a mysterious samurai "who smells of sunflowers."



Directed by
SHINICHIRO WATANABE
(Cowboy Bebop, Animatrix)

Character designs by
KAZUTO NAKAZAWA
(Kill Bill Vol. 1, El Hazard, Black Heaven)

Production designs by
MAHIRO MAEDA
(Last Exile, Blue Submarine No.6)

Samurai action powered by a hip-hop infusion featuring fresh sounds from Tsutchie, fat jon, Nujabes and FORCE OF NATURE!

- 16x9 Anamorphic Widescreen Video!
- English 5.1 surround sound and Japanese 5.1 DTS surround sound audio!
- Also available with an collectible art box containing volume 1 and a limited edition bandana!
- Samurai Champloo soundtrack also available!

サムライチャンプルー
SAMURAI CHAMPLOO
Volume 01
Geneon Pioneer
DVD

www.SamuraiChamplooDVD.com

www.GeneonAnimation.com

GENEON
Pioneer

"It's unbelievable samurai action, humor and hip-hop stir-fried in cool."

- Anime Insider

© manglobe/Shimoigusa Champloos

anime essentials

must-have anime, manga & music

read this

TRIGUN
トライガン
#1
TRIGUN
DEEP SPACE PLANET FUTURE GUN ACTION!!
YASUHIRO NIGHTOW
内藤泰弘
YASUHIRO NIGHTOW

Trigun #1 Deep Space Planet Future Gun Action!

Publisher: Dark Horse/Digital Manga
Now Reading: Volume 1

This impressively wrapped hardcover English-language manga, produced by Dark Horse and Digital Manga and published exclusively for Barnes & Noble, is the ultimate keepsake with the added bonus of being a spectacular read.

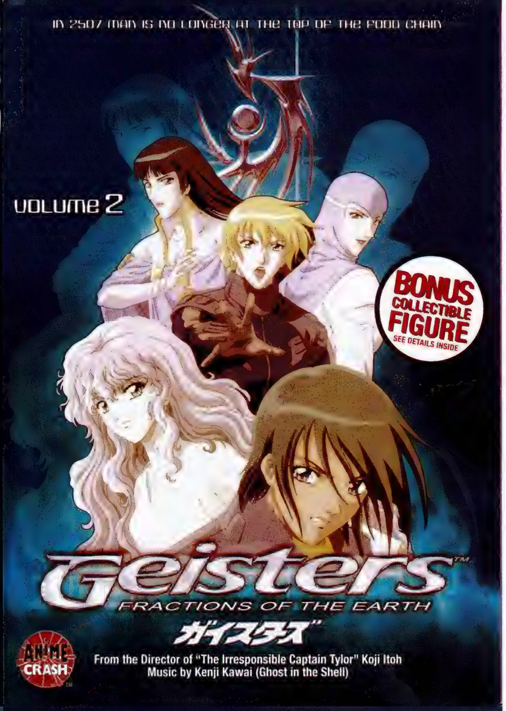
DearS
ディアーズ
PEACH-PIT presents
01
TOKYOPOP

DearS

Publisher: TokyoPop
Now Reading: Volume 1

Aliens have not only landed on Earth, but become a normal part of society. Not exactly the little green men we expected, what you see—beautiful beings called "DearS"—is what you get. This is the story of one such being and the boy she calls master.

watch this

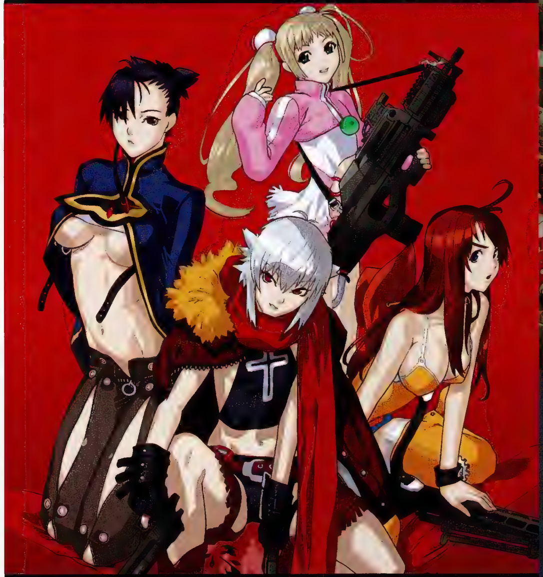

IN 2507 MAN IS NO LONGER AT THE TOP OF THE FOOD CHAIN
VOLUME 2
BONUS COLLECTIBLE FIGURE
SEE DETAILS INSIDE
Geisters
FRACTIONS OF THE EARTH
ガイスターズ
ANIME CRASH
From the Director of "The Irresponsible Captain Tylor" Koji Itoh
Music by Kenji Kawai (Ghost in the Shell)

Geisters: Fractions of the Earth

Released by: Anime Crash
Now Playing: Volume 2

In Anime Crash's CG/animation hybrid, Dobius is the new Rome and House Juno the ruling family in this post-apocalyptic telling of humanity's struggle to reclaim Earth 300 years after fleeing to the safety of outer space.

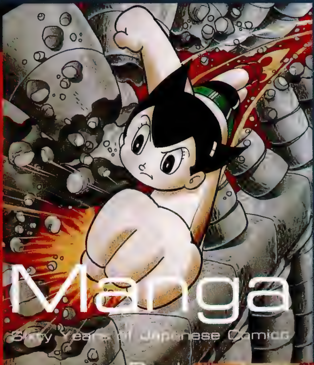
get ready for this



Burst Angel

Released by: FUNimation Productions

FUNimation's next 800-pound gorilla, following in the deep footsteps of Full Metal Alchemist, Burst Angel—about a pastry chef who unknowingly hooks up with a band of ruthless mercenaries—is, as you can see, worth getting extremely, if not overly, excited about.


Manga
Sixty Years of Japanese Comics

Manga: Sixty years of Japanese Comics by Paul Gravett

Publisher: Harper Collins International

A fascinating journey following the rich history of manga, full of fascinating facts and loaded with rare art and passages chronicling how manga has evolved over six decades.

Comic Artists-Asia

Publisher: Harper Design International

This is simply a treasure: a 124-page art book you'll return to with frightening frequency to drink in designs from the likes of Kumiko, Kon-Shu, D.K, MAXX, Opon, Shigery Katou and more. www.harpercollins.com

COMIC ARTISTS-ASIA
Manga Manhwa Manhua

TEXHNOLYZE
[teknolaiz]
SUSPICIONS

Texhnolyze

Released by: Geneon Entertainment
Now Playing: Volume 4

Madhouse's dark saga of an underground city where you show your strength by separating your opponents from their limbs continues its painfully compelling trek into the pit of humankind's pitch-black underbelly.

"UNUSUALLY INTELLIGENT AND CHALLENGING SCIENCE FICTION, AIMED AT SMART AUDIENCES"
ROGER EBERT, *SISKEL & EBERT*

MAMORU OSHII'S ANIMATED THRILLER

GHOST IN THE SHELL

SPECIAL EDITION

DIGITALLY REMASTERED VISUALLY & SONICALLY!

GHOST IN THE SHELL
MAMORU OSHII'S ANIMATED THRILLER
BASED ON THE MANGA BY MASAMUNE SHIROW
SPECIAL EDITION
DVD VIDEO
MANGA VIDEO

"TWO THUMBS UP" SISKEL & EBERT

"A VISUAL TOUR DE FORCE"
WIRED MAGAZINE

GHOST IN THE SHELL took the world by storm, exhibiting a new dimension of anime with unprecedented, mesmerizing cinematic expression. Seamlessly merging traditional cel animation with the latest computer graphic imagery, this stunning sci-fi spectacle challenged the boundaries of mainstream animation with detailed artistic expression and a uniquely intelligent story line.

Veteran director Mamoru Oshii skillfully creates the ultimate anime experience in this futuristic masterpiece based on the ground-breaking comic book by Masamune Shirow. A movie that questions human existence in the fast-paced world of the information age, this award-winning, cyber-tech thriller has established itself as one of the best Japanese animation films of all time.

"STUNNING... THE FIRST TRULY ADULT ANIMATION FILM TO REACH A LEVEL OF LITERARY AND VISUAL EXCELLENCE" JAMES CAMERON, *ALIENS, TERMINATOR*

WINNER 1997 WORLD ANIMATION CELEBRATION AWARDS
"Best Theatrical Feature Film" & "Best Director Of A Theatrical Feature Film"

SPECIAL FEATURES:

• Character Dossiers • Creator Biography • Director Biography • Digital Works • Production Report • Ghost in the Shell Trailers • Previews • DVD Catalog • Web Links • • Digitally Remastered Anamorphic Widescreen Feature • Custom Motion Interactive Menus • English 6.1 DTS-ES Surround • English 5.1 Dolby Digital-EX Surround • • Japanese 6.1 DTS-ES Surround • Japanese 5.1 Dolby Digital-EX Surround • Spanish Dolby Digital Stereo • • French Dolby Digital Stereo • Italian Dolby Digital Stereo • • German Dolby Digital Stereo • English Subtitles •

CUSTOM COLLECTORS 2-DISC SET IN SILVER-FOILED THREE-FOLD DIGI-PACK!
2-SIDED FULL-COLOR SPECIAL EDITION POSTER AND POSTCARD INCLUDED!

MANGA VIDEO

AVAILABLE 1.11.05
AT THESE & OTHER
GREAT RETAILERS
EVERYWHERE!

Virgin MEGASTORE amazon.com SUNCOAST Where You Buy Movies fye BORDERS BEST BUY MEDIA PLAY TOWER RECORDS • VIDEO • BOOKS RIGHTSTUF

WWW.MANGA.COM

©2004 Manga Entertainment, Inc

Purchase any title featured below at your nearest Virgin Megastore or online at **virginmega.com**

animedatabase

Virgin Megastore Top Ten

01	**Lady Death** *adv films*
02	**Ninja Scroll TV vol. 3** *urban vision*
03	**Inu Yasha The Movie 2** *viz, llc*
04	**Submarine 707R** *geneon entertainment*
05	**Ghost in the Shell: SAC** *manga/bandai entertainment*
06	**Paranoia Agent** *geneon entertainment*
07	**Dead Leaves** *manga entertainment*
08	**Chrono Crusade** *adv films*
09	**Requiem from the Darkness** *geneon entertainment*
10	**Full Metal Alchemist** *funimation productions*

Play Magazine Top Ten

01	**Samurai Champloo** *geneon entertainment*
02	**Appleseed** *geneon entertainment*
03	**Full Metal Alchemist** *funimation productions*
04	**Get Backers** *adv films*
05	**The Daichis: EDF** *geneon entertainment*
06	**Ghost in the Shell: SAC** *manga/bandai entertainment*
07	**Ikki Tousen** *geneon entertainment*
08	**Chrono Crusade** *adv films*
09	**Texhnolyze** *geneon entertainment*
10	**Dokkoida!?** *geneon entertainment*

sponsored by Virgin MEGASTORE

VIRGINMEGA.COM

your megastore beckons!

Requiem from the Darkness
geneon entertainment

This is what happens when your past comes back to haunt, then kill, you...

Submarine 707R
geneon entertainment

An aquatic epic that demands your immediate attention.

Dave Halverson

01	**Samurai Champloo** *geneon entertainment*
02	**Burst Angel** *funimation productions*
03	**Full Metal Alchemist** *funimation productions*
04	**Get Backers** *adv films*
05	**Chrono Crusade** *adv films*

Marvin Gleicher, president, Manga Ent.

01	**Ninja Scroll** *manga entertainment*
02	**Ghost in the Shell** *manga entertainment*
03	**Blood: The Last Vampire** *manga entertainment*
04	**Metropolis 2** *sony pictures*
05	**Akira** *geneon entertainment*

Nelson Lui

01	**Samurai Champloo** *geneon entertainment*
02	**Bubblegum Crisis OVA** *animeigo*
03	**Appleseed** *geneon entertainment*
04	**Popotan** *geneon entertainment*
05	**Full Metal Alchemist** *funimation productions*

Readers' Anime Top Five

01	**Full Metal Alchemist** *funimation productions*
02	**Ghost in the Shell: SAC** *manga/bandai entertainment*
03	**Super Milk Chan** *adv films*
04	**Ikki Tousen** *geneon entertainment*
05	**Lady Death** *adv films*

Play Magazine Manga Top Five

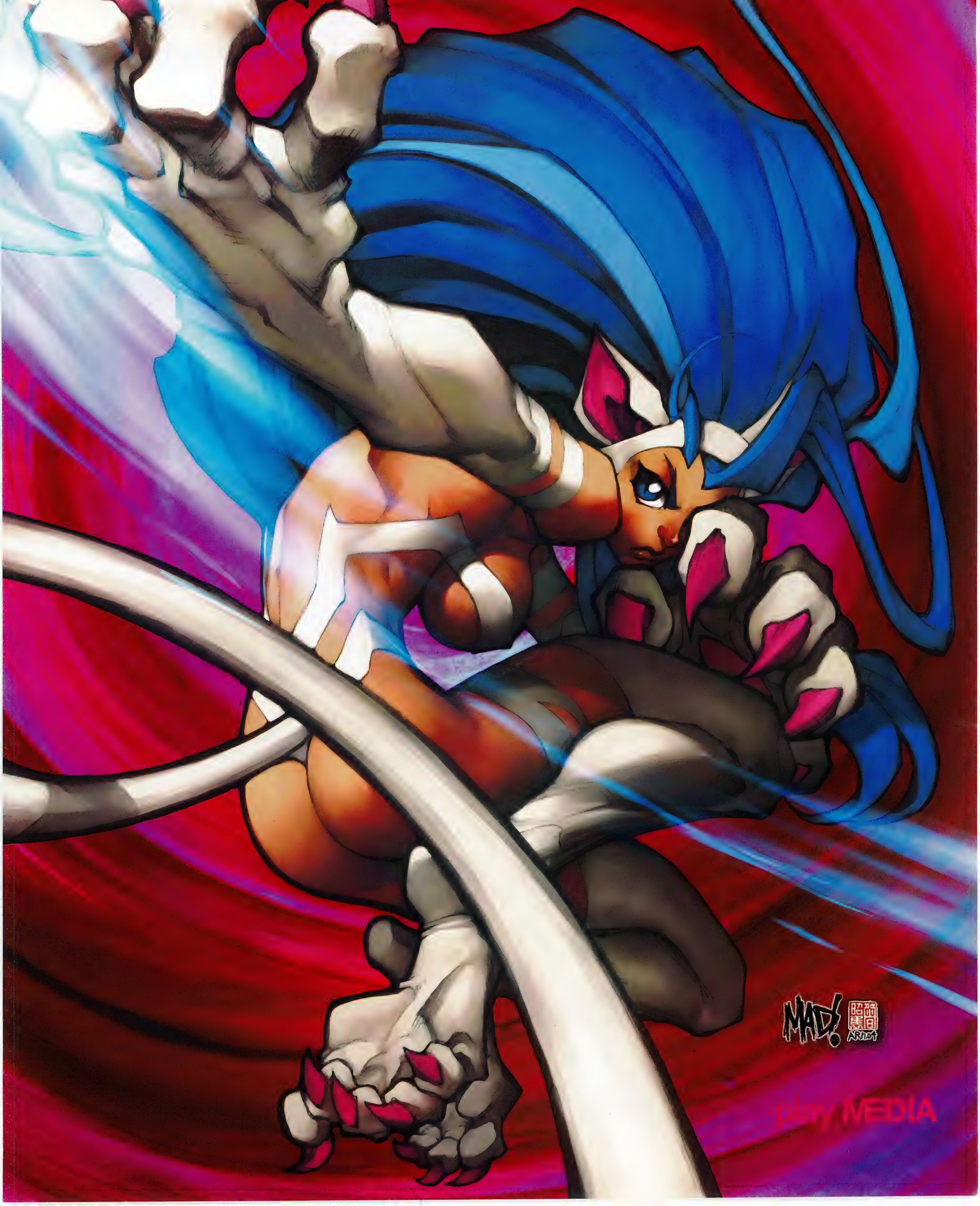
01	**Tokyo Tribes vol. 1** *tokyopop manga*
02	**Abenobashi MSA vol. 2** *tokyopop manga*
03	**The Ring vol. 1** *dark horse/digital manga*
04	**Gundam SEED ASTRAY vol. 3** *tokyopop manga*
05	**Berserk vol. 5** *dark horse/digital manga*

Play Magazine Music Top Five

01	**Appleseed OST** *tofu records*
02	**Refrain of Evangelion** *geneon anime music*
03	**Abenobashi OST** *geneon anime music*
04	**Sonic Heroes OST** *geneon anime music*
05	**Gungrave OST** *geneon anime music*

win free anime!

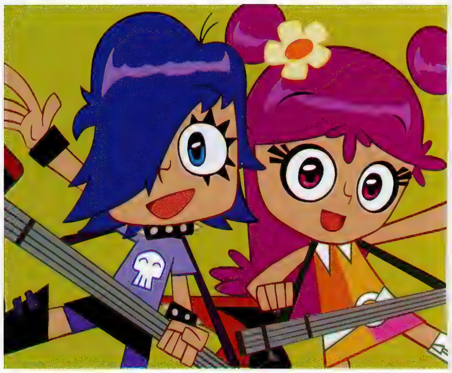
E-mail your top 5 current releases, name and address to anime@playmagazine.com and you're entered!
Each month 1 winner will receive a free anime and free year subscription, with two runners up receiving a free year of Play.
Winners will be posted monthly. Good luck!


MAD!
ARh.04
play MEDIA

Hi Hi Puffy AmiYumi

Say hello to Ami and Yumi—in their *conservative* attire.

Looking for something more than just a little bit different? There's now a heavy dose of J-Pop madness nestled comfortably between the likes of *Miguzi* and Adult Swim over on the Cartoon Network (check cartoonnetwork.com for local listings). You may have to wear shades to block the gleaming rays of purple bling, but *Hi-Hi Puffy AmiYumi* is some seriously refreshing pop culture, in contrast to our version mulling over Britney's bloody marriage, manufactured actresses-come-pop-divas and lip-synching controversies. Could this be the precursor to Japanese reality shows invading America!? Not a chance pal, but we couldn't resist floating a few questions across the pond to Ami and Yumi. Dave Halverson



play: How much, if at all, have you had to adjust your style to gel with American TV audiences? We would hope not much, as American TV can definitely use some fresh ideas…
Ami: Not at all. We are who we are. We can't do much else. They were able to play around more with animated Ami and Yumi though.

Who came up with the concept for the show?
Yumi: A producer at Cartoon Network. We were promoting our US indie album "An Illustrated History" on Bar None Records in 2002, and we did a radio interview on National Public Radio. The producer happened to hear it while he was stuck in traffic in LA! He contacted our label rep in New York. We first sang the theme song for another show called *Teen Titans* and after that came *Hi Hi*.

Do you watch any American cartoons?
Ami: I like *Tom and Jerry*. They fight but they are really good friends.
Yumi: It's not American, but I like *Touch*. I want to be like Minami.

Are you targeting a strictly pre-teen audience or creating something that might appeal to teens and young adults as well?
Yumi: For Puffy AmiYumi music, anything goes. I hope the cartoon show ends up to be that way too, so it appeals to all kinds of people, kids as well as adults.

How's the English going? Ready to take on the world?
Ami: Take on the world? No, we just want to have fun and play music. That's all.
Yumi: Please teach me English!

You have such an amazing body of work available in Japan. If the show hits, any chance you'll release a "best-of" in English?
Ami: Probably not just in English. We sing some songs in English and some in Japanese. I think having both represents who we are better.

Are you interested in penetrating American pop music the way you have in Japan?
Ami: We feel very happy that people in America are getting to know our music, and if *Hi Hi Puffy AmiYumi* can be a way for more people to hear our music, we would be even more happy. Who would have thought anyone outside of Japan would know us?

Do you listen to American pop or rock? What do you like?
Ami and Yumi: Red Hot Chili Peppers, Jellyfish. From Japan: Tamio Okuda, New Rotica.

What's big in Japan right now? Has hip-hop invaded?
Yumi: Earthquakes. Very scary.

Any new game, movie, or anime projects in the works?
Yumi: Just finished my first Japanese feature film, which will come out in 2005!

See you in America! Thanks for your time…
Ami and Yumi: We hope to see you on tour in 2005! Thank you for listening. **play**

"I like Tom and Jerry. They fight but they are really good friends" Yumi, of Hi Hi Puffy AmiYumi

Napoleon Dynamite

Starring: Jon Heder, Jon Gries, Aaron Ruell, Efren Ramirez, Tina Majorino
Director: Jared Hess
Released By: MTV Films (DVD)
Rated: PG

Every now and then you see a film and immediately recognize that it is destined for cult status. Movies like *Office Space*, *Army of Darkness* and more recently *Team America* come to mind. Most people will dismiss them quickly and move on to the Tom Hanks movie of the moment, but a small group of people will cheer and celebrate the brilliance of a film that they alone can truly appreciate. *Napoleon Dynamite* is just such a movie. Named for the film's leading character, *Napoleon Dynamite* brings us into the life of a supremely unlikable nerd, hilariously played by Jon Heder. Napoleon lives in a small Idaho town with his even nerdier older brother (Aaron Ruell), who aspires to be a cage fighter when not "meeting babes online," and his sleazy uncle Rico (Jon Gries) who shows up to watch over things when a dune buggy accident puts Grandma in the hospital. A victim of constant bullying, Napoleon's life at school is not much better. Things begin to look up, however, when a new student named Pedro arrives, played to bland perfection by Efren Ramirez. Together, accompanied by potential girlfriend Deb (Tina Majorino), they set out to defy the odds and get Pedro elected school president.

Diedrich Bader of *The Drew Carey Show* makes a brief but funny cameo as martial arts instructor Rex, founder of the Rex Kwon Do fighting system.

One might be tempted to describe *Napoleon Dynamite* as *Revenge of the Nerds*, without the revenge, but if Napoleon and his friends are indeed nerds, they don't know it, and more importantly they don't seem to care. Perhaps that is why *Napoleon Dynamite* is so satisfying…or maybe it's just the "sweet" dialogue.

Extras: Director/actor commentary, deleted scenes, making-of featurette, still gallery, original short film "Peluca." M. Eisenberg

Movie: A- Extras: B+

The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King

Limited Edition Collector's DVD Gift Set

Starring: Elijah Wood, Viggo Mortensen, Ian McKellen
Director: Peter Jackson
Released By: New Line
Rated: PG-13

Eighty bucks for this four-disc DVD set—and it's worth every penny. It's enough that you're getting the extended version of the richest, most assured, most gloriously entertaining film in the series—director Peter Jackson's most precious gift to end a most precious trilogy, the kind of movie making that Hollywood may never achieve again. I'm not that big on collectibles, but I'll make an exception for the five-inch sculpture of Minas Tirith, which joins an original DVD concert of Howard Shore's evocative score, along with an absolutely gorgeous box, painted with a scene of Frodo, Sam and Gollum trekking to Mount Doom, integrated around an image of Gandalf the White confronting Angmar. The list of extras is insane, closing out the trilogy on a perfect note. The cast has always shown immense love and commitment for their work, and it shows on the immense audio commentary, which also breaks down over the director and writers, as well as the production teams and design teams. Documentaries galore range from new to a continuation of what began on the last extended features discs. Brady Fiechter

Movie A Extras A

Alien Vs. Predator

Starring: Sanaa Lathan, Raoul Bova, Lance Henriksen
Director: Paul Anderson
Released By: 20th Century Fox
Rated: PG-13

So let me get this straight: the Aliens are bred by the Predators, sent out to provide a means for chest-pounding hunting rights? And the Aliens are housed in this constantly shifting pyramid deep below the Antarctic surface, attracting a research team who wants to excavate this amazing find, oblivious to the fact that these aliens are about to come alive, breed within a matter of seconds, and attract the Predators back to Earth for a battle to the death? Sure, why not: Aliens confronting Predators is just too easy a sell for people like me who forgive all the silliness and bombastic directing and stupid dialogue in exchange for high energy and slick, cool sets. At least it was in the theater. Watching this barely passable, weirdly sanitized movie again on DVD left me a lot less amused the second time, but I do like director Paul Anderson's visual sensibilities and occasionally interesting shots.

Extras: Few deleted scenes give way to substantial commentary by the director, cast members Lance Henriksen, Sanaa Lathan, Alec Gillis and Tom Woodruff Jr. and visual effects supervisor John Bruno. Making-of featurette and 65 stills in the Darkhorse AVP Comic Covers Gallery join a slight look at the AVP graphic novel in the works. B. Fiechter

Movie: C+ Extras: B-

Resident Evil Apocalypse

Starring: Milla Jovivich, Ohded Fehr, Sienna Guillory
Director: Alexander Witt
Released By: Screen Gems
Rated: PG-13

As much as I'd like to say otherwise, *Resident Evil Apocalypse* isn't a good movie. I know that, being a video game magazine, we're supposed to look beyond things like levitating Harley Davidsons, bad Thriller video rip-offs and Jill Valentine wearing her tube top to splatter zombies by choice, but this is a stretch.

So, the T-Virus has escaped into Raccoon City and the bulk of the populous has a newfound taste for human flesh…time to break out the super pimp with the mack-daddy dual pistols, a couple of left-for-dead Umbrella soldiers, an army of helmet-headed men in riot gear, lots of black SUVs and, of course, dueling prodigal sons Alice and Nemesis to see which super weapon Umbrella might like to sell at Toys 'R' Us next season. Not that *Apocalypse* is completely without merit; the opening credits are kinda slick and some of the shots garner a golf clap, but when you see a director pan and hold on a skull crawling with worms in a graveyard…seek asylum.

Extras: Skipping any real extras for obvious reasons (you wouldn't ask your dentist to pull *another* tooth, now would you), it's worth checking out the cast commentary just to hear Sienna Guillory go on about how complex the Jill Valentine character was…how the script depicted her as a people person, someone who cares about people. What movie was she watching? Dave Halverson

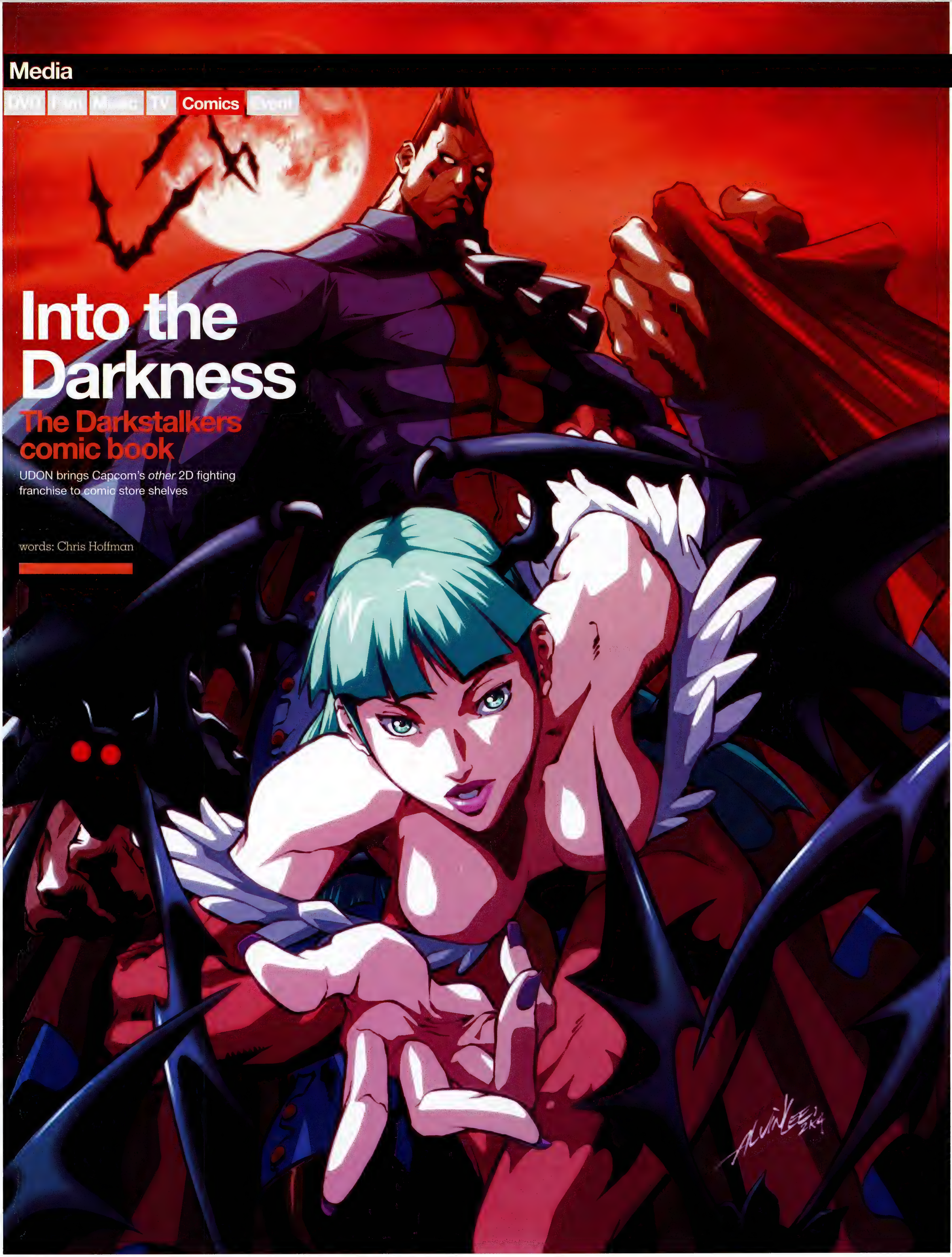
Movie: C- Extras: D

Harold & Kumar Go To White Castle

Starring: John Cho, Kal Penn, Malin Akerman
Director: Danny Leiner
Released By: Warner Home Video
Rated: R

Never heard of White Castle? Basically, it's a fast food joint you'll find a lot of in the Midwest, offering choice burgers typically suitable for emptying the change in your pocket when there's nothing else in the area at 4 AM and you'd, at that point, be OK with eating the cup holder in your car. It's also great when you're high all the time like the likeable Harold and Kumar, who decide one day that their munchies must be alleviated. Road trip to White Castle! Danny Leiner, who also directed the inferior but funny *Dude, Where's My Car?*, keeps the laughs at a constant pitch, surprisingly adding warmth and depth to the typically dumb-ass buddy road-trip comedy. Along with deranged raccoons and cheetahs and tow-truck drivers, Neil Patrick Harris makes a hilarious entrance as a drugged-up tag along. A seriously funny, thoughtful surprise. Brady Fiechter

Movie: B+ Extras: C



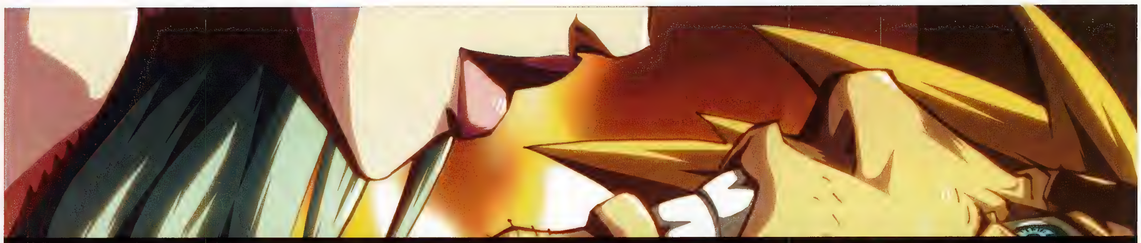
Into the Darkness

The Darkstalkers comic book

UDON brings Capcom's *other* 2D fighting franchise to comic store shelves

words: Chris Hoffman

Following the success of their excellent Street Fighter comic book, UDON Entertainment and Devil's Due Publishing have unleashed the latest addition to their video game-based comic library: Darkstalkers, based upon Capcom's horror-themed fighting game of the same name, where vampires, werewolves and other legendary creatures of the night battle for control of the demon realm. As evidenced by the preview in UDON's convention-exclusive Capcom Summer Special 2004—featuring a tale centered on everyone's favorite succubus, Morrigan—the fascinating stories lined up for the series promise to delve deep into the Darkstalkers mythos, and the artwork is nothing short of amazing. Series writer Ken Siu-Chong (also the writer on Street Fighter) took the time to provide some insight on the creation of the Darkstalkers comic, as well as what to expect from the series as it unfolds. For more information on Darkstalkers, Street Fighter and the upcoming Rival Schools comic, visit http://www.capcomcomics.com.

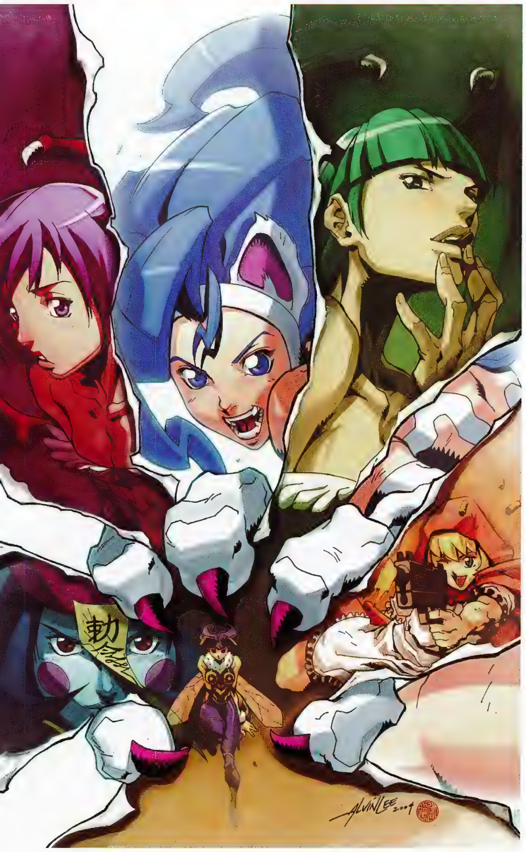


Interview

Ken Siu-Chong, writer, Darkstalkers

play: Let's start at the beginning: how and why did the Darkstalkers license come about?

Ken Siu-Chong: The "how" is pretty simple. Capcom was really happy with what UDON was doing with the Street Fighter comic series, so when Capcom put the license for Darkstalkers back on the market, they decided to give us the first crack at it. We jumped at the chance! Which brings us to the "why." Well, obviously it's logical, business-wise, since our target audience for Darkstalkers is pretty close to the audience of Street Fighter. But beyond that, we're all *huge* Darkstalkers fans—in my case at least, I'm as big a fan of Darkstalkers as I am Street Fighter. Not to sound like I'm spouting some PR nonsense, but personally, I know that there are a lot of Street Fighter fans that don't really know the Darkstalkers series since it wasn't as widespread, and I honestly hope I can start making some converts. I also know for a fact that the rest of the creative team (especially [artists] Alvin Lee and Gary Yeung) are huge DS fans as well and have been itching to work on this title for years. So just like when SF came along, it was pretty much a no-brainer for us to just take the DS license and go for it!



Of course, this is your second Capcom title (after Street Fighter), and it features a much more fantastical setting. How does that fantasy element open up creative possibilities for you?

It's been quite liberating for both the art team and myself. Even if Street Fighter wasn't completely realistic, it still had to always be within the realm of plausibility. (I always pictured SF taking place in the universe of a good kung fu flick in terms of realism.) With DS, many of those limits are gone, and I've been relishing every second of it. I've been able to stretch my imagination more and it's truly been a joy. After seeing Alvin and Gary pump out some of the best work I've ever seen them produce, I can tell that they're having a blast, too.

Darkstalkers also has a much smaller cast to work with, and not as much history. How does that affect the creation of the comic for you?

The smaller cast really does lend itself well to the comic since there aren't quite as many characters that we have to bring in, so there's more time to really explore and develop each character. In terms of history, Darkstalkers actually has a rich universe of its own that I hope really comes out in the story. That being said, it's true that the story is less defined and less complicated than the sometimes-convoluted SF continuity. That's made my job much easier and given me a certain degree of artistic freedom that I don't have the luxury of in SF.

There are a lot of similarities to Street Fighter though. Is there an added challenge of creating two titles with a rather similar basis? And how are you able to keep up with all the work?

I don't really see it as a challenge making the two series distinct. With DS's solid basis in horror and fantasy, I think the two franchises are already quite different (except for the fact that there's some emphasis on fighting). With the creation of the book, I've really enjoyed playing up this difference and focusing on the darker elements in DS. I'm actually a closet horror-movie junkie—everything from *Evil Dead 2* to *The Thing* to pretty much anything starring Vincent Price. (*Pit and the Pendulum* is my favorite for anyone who wants a good movie recommendation!)

Is the book going to have a core cast, or will everybody be getting equal page time? Judging from the UDON Summer Special, it seems like Morrigan and Lilith might be the central focus of the series for now.

Pretty much the entire cast will play at least a small role in the story. I've structured the story so that each of the characters will have some time in the spotlight to show their origins, motivations and conflicts. It's basically laid out so that each issue or two will focus on a few key characters that will be fleshed out, while an underlying plot thread centered on Morrigan, Demitri and Pyron will run in parallel.

Will the title mostly focus on the current conflicts of the Darkstalkers characters, or will it go into the origins of the characters? It seems like there's a rich vein to tap.

Each character has such a rich history, it'd be a crime to not show them. My goal will be to progress the underlying plot each issue while not sacrificing character development.

How are you going to deal with characters' morality? They're creatures of darkness, but you've gotta have your protagonists too. Will some of the characters just be straight-up heroic?

That's the tricky part. Some characters are heroic (like Donovan and Hsien-Ko), while some are definitely all-out evil (like Raptor and Demitri), while others are sort of in-between and amoral. I'd put Morrigan in that category. While she *does* feed on human souls, she doesn't go out of her way to cause pain and suffering for the human race—she actually sees herself as simply taking people's souls in exchange for eternal bliss.

And on the flip side, Pyron and Jedah have been the top villains in the games; will they be taking on similar roles in this series?

For the first arc (which will loosely follow Night Warriors), Pyron will be the top villain that looms in the background for the entire series until it reaches its climax. Jedah will be the main villain in the next big arc that will bring in all the Vampire Savior characters.

What kind of storylines and character interactions should we expect from the early issues of the series?

Now, now…you don't expect me to give anything away do you? All I'll say is that fans of the game won't be disappointed—all the characters will be explored in detail and I promise to do my best to make sure, in terms of personality and interaction, everyone will be true to their character. In the first six issues, fans can look forward to seeing Morrigan, Demitri, Donovan, Anita, Felicia, Talbain and Victor take the spotlight, while the rest of the Night Warriors cast slowly works their way in in subsequent issues, eventually leading up

"Each character has such a rich history, it'd be a crime to not show them. My goal will be to progress the underlying plot each issue while not sacrificing character development." Ken Siu-Chong, writer, Darkstalkers to a big battle that basically determines the fate of the world. If that doesn't get fans excited, I don't know what will!

From what you've written so far, have any personal favorite characters emerged? Any that you ended up liking more than expected?
Don't make me choose! Seriously though, while I love the entire cast, my favorites have always been Donovan and Anita. They're such tragic characters, and I love the interplay between them. From what I've written so far, I've definitely discovered how much more I like Victor's child-like character and the whole alternate take on the whole Frankenstein mythos. But I've also discovered that Morrigan is full of untapped potential storyline-wise (such as her relationship with her father). She's not just a walking pair of boobs!
Oh, actually there are two characters that surprised the hell out of me in terms of how much I liked writing them—you know those two guys from Morrigan's game endings? I love those guys!

Just going off of the cover to the Wizard World Chicago special, it seems that Darkstalkers is going to be a bit sexier than Street Fighter. Is this fair to say, and has it affected the book from a creative standpoint?
Overall, Darkstalkers will definitely have a slightly more mature tone to go along with the horror elements. It'll have its lighter moments (such as Felicia and Sasquatch), but overall, DS will definitely have a deliberately darker story than Street Fighter. Sometimes that means there will be more violence and even some sexuality (which is an important part of Morrigan's character since she's a succubus), but it will all be in the framework of the story. With that said, we want this story to be accessible to a wide audience, so the sex and violence will be kept roughly in the PG-13 range.
Creatively, I think the slightly more mature atmosphere works well. I've actually taken this opportunity to make DS a vehicle to tell some stories I've always wanted to tell that work perfectly in the world of Darkstalkers. Like my fascination with horror movies, I have a similar love of good ghost stories…both dramatic, literary ones and more popcorn-like shockers. I hope to make some stories that take elements from both ends of the spectrum.

Speaking of the Summer Special, is the House of Doma anything significant?
That will come into play in the next arc when Jedah takes the stage.

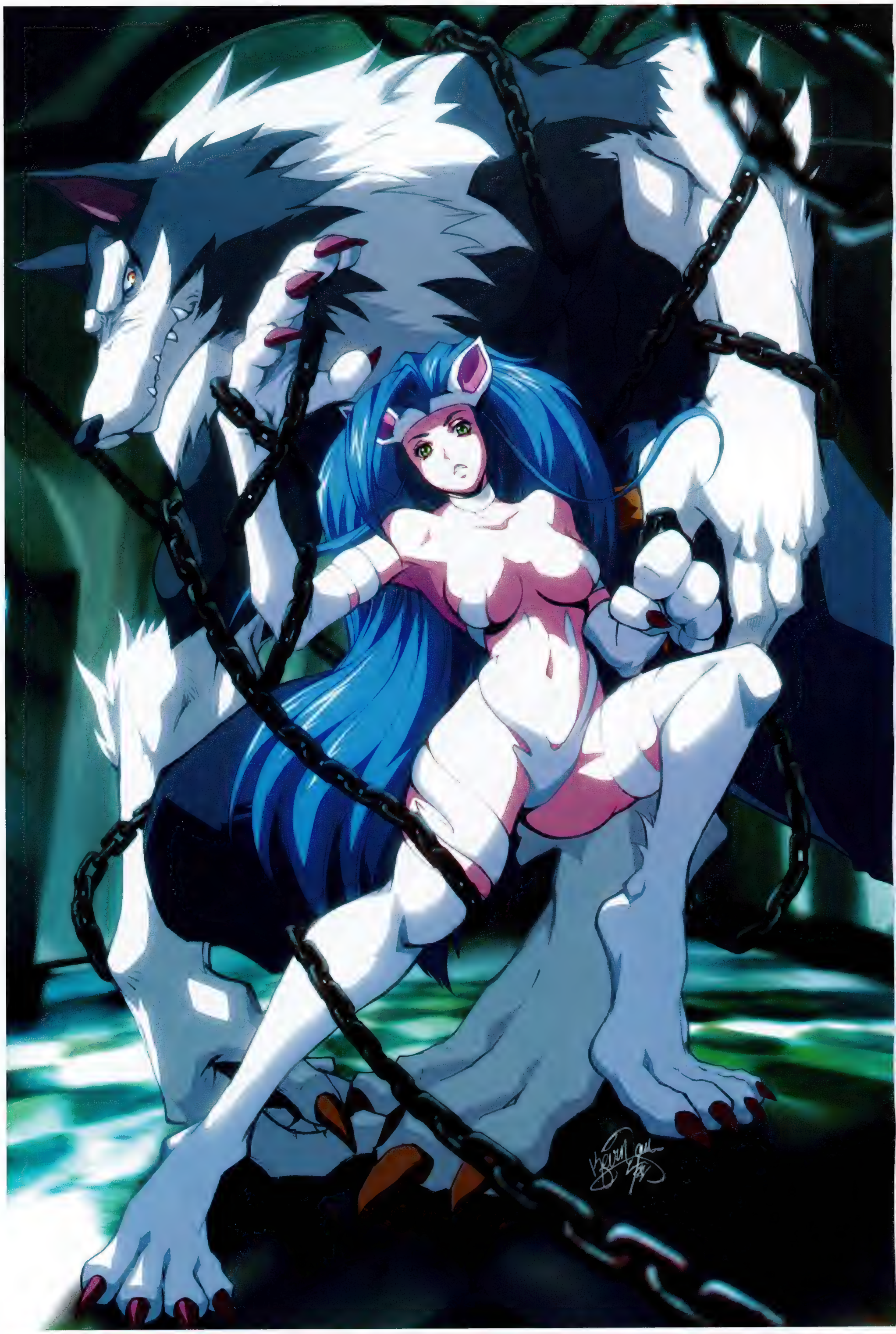
How are you fleshing out the Darkstalkers world? Has Capcom provided you with any new insight into this universe, or have you been creating it on your own?
A combination of both. Like I said, Darkstalkers has a developed continuity of its own that I'll be sticking to primarily, but there is a lot of room to expand and interpret.

Now that you have Street Fighter, Darkstalkers and Rival Schools, does that create crossover possibilities?
The possibility is there, but I don't think it'll be happening anytime soon. While SF and RS are pretty much in the same universe, Darkstalkers is pretty out there. I mean, some of the weakest Darkstalkers characters would probably kick the ass of the most powerful SF characters! It would make for some pretty quick fights!

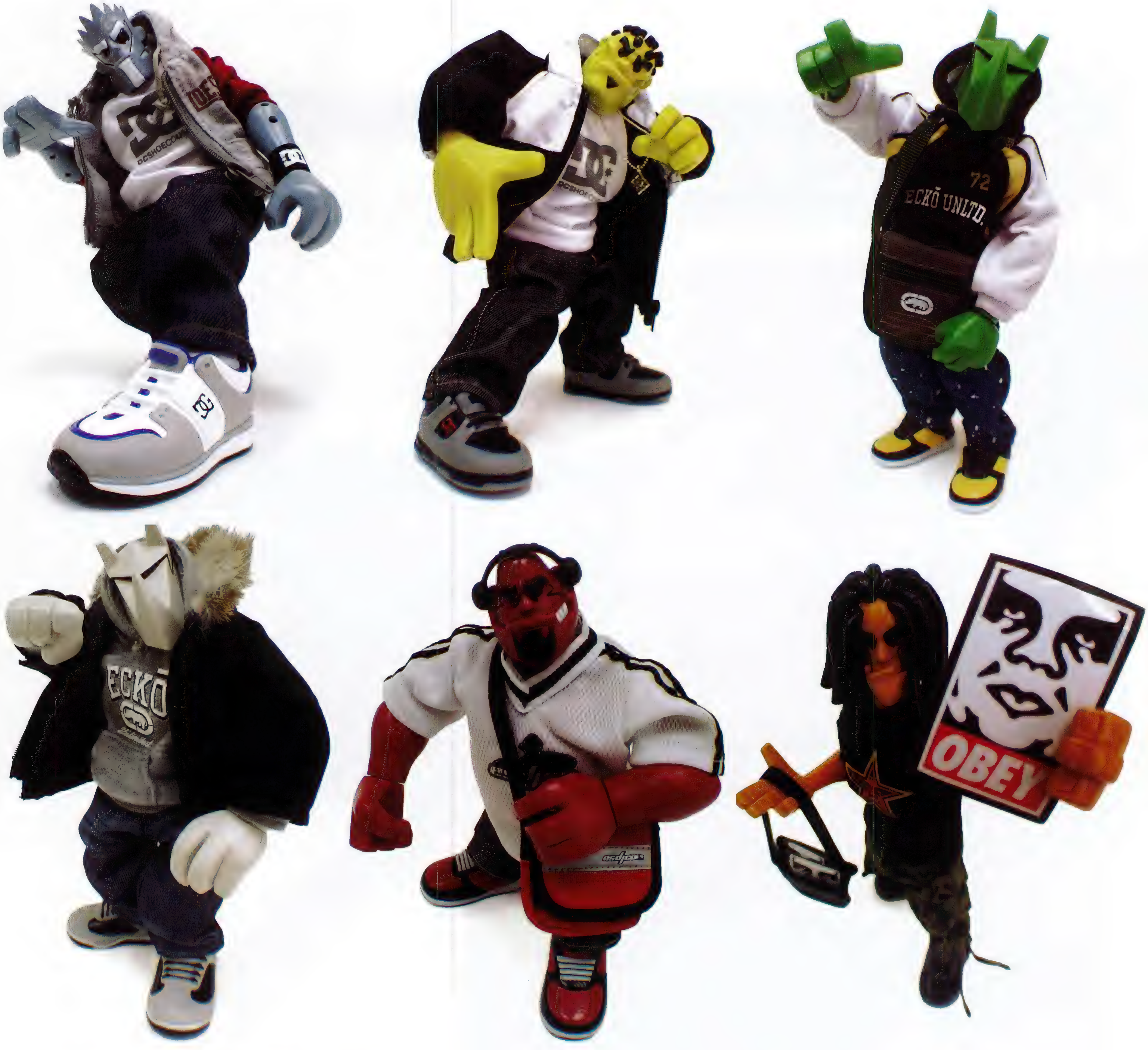
Who's your Darkstalkers (or Night Warriors or Vampire Savior) character of choice and why?
I usually play as Morrigan because I seem to always get my ass kicked when I play as anyone else…

By the way, I loved UDON's work in Capcom Fighting Evolution. How'd that happen, and should we expect any more UDON work in Capcom's games?
It stemmed from how much Capcom liked what we were doing with the SF comic series. When they called to offer us the opportunity to actually work on some in-game artwork, how could we refuse? As for future collaborations, we hope so! I guess it depends on how successful Fighting Evolution is…so fans, go buy that game now! **play**

> "Overall, Darkstalkers will definitely have a slightly more mature tone to go along with the horror elements."
>
> Ken Siu-Chong, writer, Darkstalkers



There's some animal attraction going on in this cover image to Darkstalkers issue #3.



Citizen Urban Icon Poseables

From the top left: DC Shoe “Blend” and “Decade,” ecko unlimited “Otherground Dwella” and “Thug,” Esdjco “DJ Extra” and finally Obey “Propaganda.” The aluminum cases that house these fully 18-point articulated, 10-inch-tall urban kooks are worth the $19.99 alone, and the figures are sweet with amazingly detailed clothes that hang like the real thing.

Wireless online enhancement

logitech

www.logitech.com

Cordless Headset for Xbox $79.00

Play Link $99.00

Controller wires are so passé now. It's all about the cordless. You know the drill—you hook up your Xbox controller, you plug in the Xbox Live headset—only to have cords everywhere. You can toss those aside now. When used together with Logitech's Cordless Precision Xbox Controller, the Logitech Cordless Headset gives players one less thing to worry about. Utilizing 2.4GHz technology, players can enjoy lag-free audio transmissions from 30 feet away. But what we liked most about the Cordless Headset was how clear we sounded during gameplay. While the regular Xbox Live headset has a real muffled sound to it, the sound quality with the Logitech is like speaking on a land phone line. It's that good. But before you go jump into an online battle, make sure you're hooked up with Logitech's Play Link wireless extensions. Whether you want to hook up your Xbox or PS2, the Play Link eliminates the need to purchase expensive networking equipment. Just plug one unit into your console and the other unit into your router. That's it! No software to install, nothing to configure—you're good to go in under five seconds. The Play Link wireless extension uses 900 MHz RF technology, which translates to a range of 100 feet. Transfer speeds have a rate of 1.5 Mbps. What's cool is that the Play Link works with other consumer electronics, not just video game consoles. Laptops, digital video recorder, satellite receiver, etc.—all can use the Play Link.

XBOX
Logitech
Logitech
Logitech
Logitech

Wear this wireless Xbox Live headset and be super cool.

You can connect your gaming console wirelessly to your router with these to create a little wireless network.

Audio upgrade

Creative

www.creative.com

PCMCIA Sound Blaster Audigy 2 ZS Notebook $129.00

Creative I-Trigue 3400 2.1 Speaker System $129.00

When talking about notebook computers, most of the hype usually surrounds the processor and/or the graphics chip. The one area that every manufacturer always manages to neglect is the sound card. You can have the baddest laptop on the planet, but more than likely, your sound quality isn't going to be the greatest. That is until now. Creative's latest notebook wonder is a PCMCIA Sound Blaster Audigy 2 ZS card. Just plug it into your PCMCIA slot and you have a full-featured sound card in your notebook. Housed in a tiny card is THX-certified 24-bit Advanced HD audio quality playback with unheard of 104dB SNR. It also supports 7.1 surround sound for Dolby Digital EX as well as DTS-ES for movie playback and for games; it supports EAX 4.0 Advanced HD. You can plug in a set of headphones or you can plug in speakers like the Creative I-Trigue 3400 2.1 Speaker System. Sure these speakers may appear small and weak, but when you plug these into the ZS Notebook card, they come to life with impressive sound. The 2.1 speakers integrate three 1-inch titanium micro drivers in each speaker as well as a 6.5-inch long-throw driver in the subwoofer. Sound quality was not only booming, but crystal clear too. And with the included auxiliary input cable, you can plug your MP3 player right into the speaker system without having your computer turned on. Whether we were listening to music or playing a game, we were blown away by the quality. And for the price, you can't beat it.

CREATIVE
Sound
BLASTER
AUDIGY 2 ZS
Notebook
24bit
THX

Cutting-edge interface

Saitek

www.saitek.com

Saitek Gamer's Keyboard $59.00

Saitek Cyborg evo Force Feedback Joystick $69.00

What we liked most about Saitek's Gamer's Keyboard was how simple the design was. Even though there are no special shortcut keys or game-specific overlays, we found the keyboard one of the best to use for gaming. The keys are not only comfortable but incredibly responsive. But the coolest feature of the Gamer's Keyboard is the blue backlight underneath the keys. With an adjustable brightness button, you can use this keyboard in complete darkness. For games like Doom 3 and Vampire: The Masquerade, which are better played in the dark, this keyboard is perfect. But if you'd rather use a joystick instead of a keyboard, you may want to check out the Saitek Cyborg evo Force Feedback Joystick. With a customizable head and stick, this is the first fully adjustable force-feedback stick that can be used by both left- and right-handed players. The evo features five thumb buttons, a rapid-fire trigger, four buttons at the base, two shift buttons and an eight-way point-of-view switch. After playing Desert Combat with this baby, we were sold. Compared to other joysticks on the market, the force feedback was quite strong and felt good in our hands. On the flipside, our only complaint with the evo was how light it was—we always were holding onto the base during gameplay.

evo
Saitek
F1
F2
F3
F4

Saitek
Saitek

AFTERGLOW

FULLY FEATURED, FULLY TRANSPARENT...FULL OF GLOW.

for PS2™
for GameCube™
for Xbox®

KALEIDOSCOPE LOGO EFFECT

Watch the colors change right before your eyes!
Kaleidoscope effect cycles through seven illuminated colors when controller is plugged in.

IMPROVED TACTILE RUBBER GRIPS

Hang on through all the intense action with improved tactile rubber grips. Molded for extra comfort and ultimate control.

ERGONOMIC FIRE BUTTONS

Get an edge on the competition!
Additional rapid-fire buttons ergonomically positioned to enhance game play.

PELICAN

Console Protection
GUARANTEE

Pelican and its logo are registered trademarks of Pelican Accessories. Gamecube™ is a registered trademark of Nintendo of America. Xbox is a registered trademark of Microsoft Corporation. PlayStation®2 is a registered trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment. All products featured are manufactured by Pelican Accessories and are not endorsed by Nintendo of America, Microsoft Corporation, or Sony Computer Entertainment.

Light up your Holidays
AFTERGLOW PRO
for Xbox™
AFTERGLOW PRO
for PlayStation®2
AFTERGLOW PRO
for GameCube™

visit us on the web at **www.pelicanperformance.com**

THERE'S NEVER BEEN A BETTER TIME TO BE A HERO!

COLLECTOR'S DVD EDITION
CITY OF HEROES
FIRST MONTH OF PLAY INCLUDED
INTERNET CONNECTION REQUIRED
ADDITIONAL ONLINE FEES REQUIRED
TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
NCSOFT
CRYPTIC STUDIOS
MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE GAME
PVP
CITY OF HEROES
SPECIAL EDITION!

THE CITY OF HEROES COLLECTOR'S DVD EDITION

Get the game that has set new standards for massively multiplayer online gaming in this special DVD edition and you'll get so much more:

- A Limited Edition collectible Statesman™ HeroClix™ figure!
- An exclusive 16-page comic book from PvPonline™ creator Scott R. Kurtz!
- A special map/poster showing expanded areas of Paragon City!
- The first 2 expansions, "Through the Looking Glass" and "A Shadow of the Past"!
- An incredible in-game item found only in this edition of City of Heroes!

NEW COSTUMES!

NEW VILLAINS!

NEW ZONES!

WWW.CITYOFHEROES.COM

A MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER GAME FOR YOUR PC

TEEN
T
Violence
Suggestive Themes
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

©2004 Cryptic Studios, Inc. and NCsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. City of Heroes™ is a trademark of Cryptic Studios, Inc. and NCsoft Corporation. NCsoft® is a registered trademark of NCsoft Corporation. © 2004 WizKids, Inc. All rights reserved. HeroClix and WizKids are trademarks of WizKids, Inc. Patent Pending. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.

WIZKIDS™ CRYPTIC STUDIOS™ NCSOFT®